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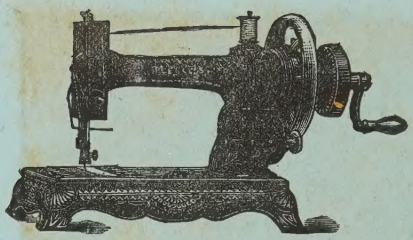

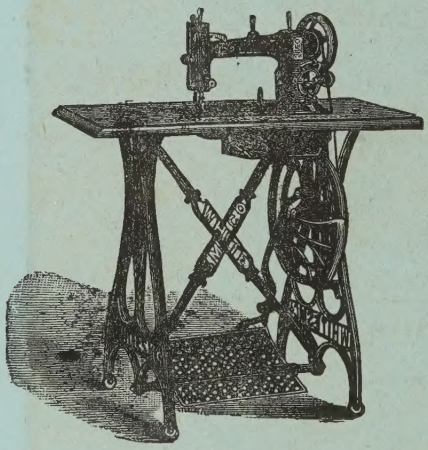

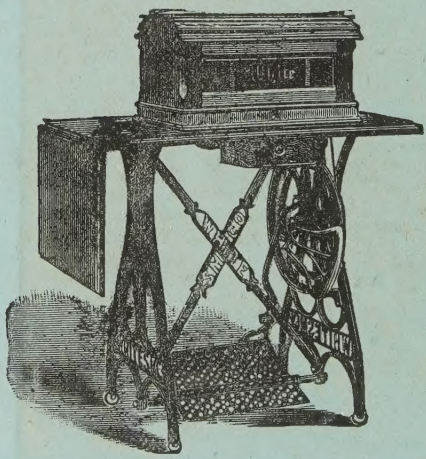

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A Dartmoor Tale.

BY

R. D. BLACKMORE.

AUTHOR OF "MARY ANERLEY," ETC.

"Splendidè mendax."

NEW AND CHEAPER EDITION

LONDON
SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON & COMPANY
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CHRISTOWELL.

CHAPTER I.

FAIR FLOWERS.

IN the fresh young vigour of an April sun, the world has a cheerful aspect, and is doubly bright, and vastly warmer, when beheld through good flint-glass. Especially while the east winds hold, which never now forget to hold the spring of England, heart and throat. But forty years ago, there were some springs of gentle quality.

Upon a pleasant April morning, of the sweet inconstant kind, such as we vainly sigh for now, a gardening man, with a quick step, came into his happy greenhouse. A door from his favourite sitting-room led into this still more favoured place; and the smile, with which he entered, showed that he expected to find pleasure here. It was a long, low, span-roof house, with no side-lights, and very simple, not even framed with rafters. Yet snug from violence of wind, and bright with every sunbeam, this humble house was rich with joy, for all who love good health, and peace.

Here, were the gay obedience, and saucy contumacy of the vine; than which no lovelier creature grows. Broad leaves flowing into pointrels, waved and cut with crisp indenture, coving into, or overlapping, the ripple of each other; clear round shoots, cresting up like swans, and sparkling with beads of their own breath; infant bunches, on the bend as yet, but promising to straighten, as the berries got their weight; some bravely announcing grapes already, some hoping to do so before nightfall, through the misty web of bloom; others only just awaking into eyes of golden dust; yet all alike rejoicing, shining, meeting the beauty of the early sun, and kindling their own to answer it.

And here was a multitude of pretty things as well, that will not

be chambered with the vine too long, yet gladly accept the kind lift upon the road from winter to summer, which her company affords. Boxes, and tubs, and pots, and pans, and frames of willow, and biscuit-cases, were cropped with growth in different stages, and of divers orders, through all the innumerable tones of green, and all the infinite variety of form. But all, to the keenest human eye, brisk, and clean, and in their duty.

The man, who had shaped these things, and led them (under the Maker's loftier will) was coming to them now, with a cheerful heart, and faith in his own handiwork. The finest gardener, that ever grew, knows well that he cannot command success, and has long outgrown young arrogance. Still he continues to hope for the best; for the essence of the gentle craft is hope, rooted in labour, and trained by love. So this man took a short taste of the air, glanced at the glass, and the glitter of the vines, and felt the climate of the house, as keenly as if he were a plant therein. For the moment, there was no fault to find. Genial warmth was in the air, and gentle dew on every leaf; in the slope of early sun through glass, no harsh heat quivered, and no fierce light glared; but morning-tide spread all soft herbage with a silver tissue.

"Now I like to see things look like this," said the man, as he very well might say; "but here are at least a score of bunches crying aloud for the thinning scissors. And where is Rose, who ought to be at them, before the sun gets up too high? Rose of roses, where are you?"

To his cheerful shout no answer came; and being of a well-contented mind, he went on to his own business. His happy nature found its province in promoting happiness, whether of beast, or bird, or life whose growth is its only movement. To all of these he felt that loving-kindness, which is nature's gift; not the brightest of her graces, but the largest and the best. Without that one redeeming gift, of which grand intellects often fail, this man being sorely tried in life, would have passed into the bitter vein, so miserable to itself, and all. His face had the lines of resolute will, and of strenuous energy; and his bodily force was but little abated by three score years of exercise. For his back was as straight as a soldier's on drill; his legs were stout and steadfast; and although he fed well, and without anxiety, none but envious whipper-snappers would have dared to call him fat.

For the other part, his mind was not disagreeably large or noble; but just in front, by the proper peg, of the general mind it met with. The general mind, that is to say, of educated people, at any rate in

that part of the world, which is as wise as any other. "Captain Larks" (as this good stranger had been called by the native voice, when first he came to Christowell) was a simple, unpretentious man, who gave himself no title. His only desire seemed to be for plain life, and retirement.

These he surely might here obtain, to the utmost of all heart's desire; so far away was Christowell from busy mart, or town, or street, or even road of carriage power. No better place could have been discovered by a man sincerely desirous of dealing as little as possible with mankind. For here were people enough to make a single head no rarity; yet not enough to force any sort of head into grievous eminence. All the inhabitants, without exertion, were important enough to feel satisfied; or at any rate to feel the duty of it; while universal opinion stopped any man from indulging in his own. It may be denied by young spread-eagles, of competitive and unruly mind, that this is the highest form of life. And it may be replied that the grand empyrean for nest or for perch offers nothing but cloud.

To Christowell, ambition was no more than a longer name for itch. Every village-man grew wiser by due seniority; and no mind, while its father lived, succeeded to authority. Youth was kept in its place, and taught that the ear must take the seed of thought, until the white hair shows it ripe; and women were allowed their weight, according to what their husbands earned.

"Christowell is all very well," the gardener went on thinking; "but if ever there was a slow place under the sun, it is one of the slowest. Pugsley will never bring my pots."

Making up his mind to the manner of mankind, with a cultivator's patience, he passed beneath clusters encroaching on the headway, and went into a tiny transept, parted from the rest of the house, by a narrow door of glass. Here was a separate shrine for flowers, intolerant of heat, and demanding air, beyond the young vine's capacity. Choice geraniums lived here, and roses, heaths, and epacrids, and double violets, lilies of the valley (sweetest of all bloom), Daphne, and the graceful deutzia, pansies also, freaked with jet, the double black polyanthus, and the white chalice of azalea. But best, and dearest of all to him, and set in a separate nook—as in a glazed bureau with lifting glass—that exquisite flower of exclusive worship, that gorgeous issue of nature and art combined to do their utmost, the magically beautiful auricula.

No gardener is worth his manure, who has not a fine conceit of

his own skill. "I should like to have some of those Lancashire fellows, or a few of those Kentish braggarts here," this man said aloud, being apt to encourage his thoughts, when alone, with the company of words; "if I know anything of the matter, this green-edged seedling, beautifully named 'Dartmoor Oasis,' by my Rose; and this grand self, one could gaze at all the day; and above all this white-edge, this glorious white-edge, worthily entitled 'Cream of Devon,'—have they anything fit to hold a candle to them? Consider the paste, take the measure of the thrum, dwell upon the band; can you spy a single slur? Above all, if you have a particle of judgment, observe the equality of the pips, the perfection of fulness, and true circle of the truss, and the grand, columnar, mealy, magnificent, staunchly upright, and splendidly proportioned —really you might say, pillar of the stalk!"

Overpowered, alike by his eloquence, and the beauty that produced it, he stopped for a moment with some gravel in his hand (with which he was going to top-dress his pots), when the little door was opened, and his Rose came in; whose presence might compel the wildest gardener to despise his own auriculas.

CHAPTER II.

POTTER'S VESSELS.

To a mind with limited powers of inquiry, such as most of us are blest with, a great truth stands forth in robust relief, without being bound to show what it stands on, or where it came from, or anything else. In this frank spirit must be accepted the incontestable fact that "Latham" (an ancient and very good surname) takes, upon the ordinary tongue of Devon, the brief, but still excellent form of "Larks." It made no difference, from their lofty point of view, that the Captain's name was not "Latham" at all, any more than he called himself a captain; but when he first appeared among the natives of this part—some fifteen years ago perhaps—his rather scanty luggage was ticketed "L. Arthur," in flowing and free manuscript. The leading genius of Christowell—a premature intellect now removed from the stabs of contumely, to higher claims—pronounced at a glance that the word spelled "Latham;" whilst some, almost equally capable of reading, confessed, and some denied it.

The landlord of the *Three Horse-shoes*, who could not sign his name (though he drew three horse-shoes, at the bottom of a bill, more correctly than many an artist could), at once backed up the decision of the wit, and settled the question, by declaring that his guest had the very same walk, all over the world, as Corporal Larks to Teigncombe had. So before Mr. Arthur was one dinner-time older, he came forth upon the public as "Captain Larks;" and finding that people only shook their heads, and looked very knowing, if he said another word, he let them have their way, until his ears and mind grew used to it.

Through an agent at Exeter, whose name was "Tucker," a neat little cottage, and some twenty acres of land near the moor, had been bought for him cheaply. Then the cottage was furnished very simply; and here he hoped to spend, in peace and solitude, his remaining days.

When he came, there was not a grey hair on his head, though his face bore marks of evil climate, and uncourteous usage, in deep-grained sunburn, and scar of steel, permanent in three places. This, and a pair of shaggy eyebrows, gave him a formidable aspect, much against the meaning of his mind. But eyes of a soft bright blue, as clear as a child's, and a nose of genial turn, and a really pleasant and hearty smile, showed plenty of good-will towards mankind, whatever man might have done to him. Moreover, his large and well-knit frame, active step, and resolute bearing, commanded the good word of womankind, the forewoman of the world's jury.

Then Parson Short, becoming now prime minister of Christowell, said his say about Captain Larks, which was to the purpose, as usual. "Under a cloud—fine fellow by his face—gentleman, according to his speech and manner. He wants to be quiet; it is none of our business. Let him alone, till he comes to us."

The settler asked for nothing better than this course of treatment. The stir of his arrival soon settled, like himself, into gentle quietude; the men of the village were kind and respectful—as men still are in Devonshire—and the women, though longing to know more about him, felt for him deeply as "the lonely gentleman," and hoped he would get over it, and have another wife.

Whatever his trouble, he sought no pity, nor even appeared despondent; but lived upon his bit of land, and worked, and whistled among his trees, as sweetly as the blackbirds that came to answer. In spite of his maturity, or perhaps by reason of it, many a village girl, too young to dream of any courting—except in dim

wonder at the number of the babies—resolved to be his wife, as soon as time should qualify her, and came up the steep hill, every fine evening, to peep through the hedge at him, and perhaps to get an apple. He, having love of children, as of all things that are natural, would rest from his work, and come out at the stile, and pat their curly heads, and ask the history of the babies, and cut for them chips, with his pruning-knife, from a big stick of liquorice in his waistcoat pocket.

Whether he had kith or kin, or any soft belongings, was a moot point at the Churchyard gate, and by many smouldering peat-fires; until, about four years after his coming, a lively, and lovely, little girl was delivered at his gate, by Tim Pugsley, the carrier. Tim went round about it, as a fox goes to his hole, and avoided the village on his way from Moreton; but in spite of all that, they were spied by a woman with a bundle of furze at the top of the cleve; and when human nature, with five shillings in its pocket, compelled Master Pugsley to pull up and bait, at the *Three Horse-shoes*, upon his homeward course, he had no call so much as to change his crown; so liberal was the desire to treat him, for the sake of the light that he could shed. The grateful carrier first drank his beer, then shook his head, as vehemently as if it had been labelled "glass with care;" and then enlightened the company with a piece of news beyond all price—"Every man should first tend his own business."

For nine or ten years, every summer, and weighing more upon each delivery, this consignment came to pass; and Pugsley (like his cart-tilt, which was of some high new patent stuff) grew dryer and dryer, every time he was wetted; till Christowell understood at last, that if anybody was to blame, for keeping the parish so unsettled, it was no less a person than the famous Bishop of Exeter. For Pugsley told them to go to the bishop, if they wanted to know all the rights; and the next confirmation in that neighbourhood was largely attended by fathers and mothers. It did them good to be confirmed again, because of their principles wearing out; and the landlord of the inn was pleased with the evening they spent after it.

Thus when Rose came down at last, "to have holiday for ever" (as she told Mr. Pugsley, every time he stopped to put a stone behind the wheel), there was scarcely any one in Christowell old enough to rejoice, who failed of that most Christian duty. The captain for once came out of his garden, and made a great bonfire of his weeds upon the beacon, and with his own hands rolled up a

great barrel of cider unknown to the natives, whose ignorance culminated towards their heads. For he now grew apples of a lordly kind, which they (having faith in their grandsires only) disdained, till it turned the tables on them.

Almost everybody said, that night, or else on the following morning, that for certain sure, such a lively maid could never abide in a place like that. Or if she did, she must soon go doiled—so tarble weist, and crule unkid as it was. For according to the way Captain Larks held his head up, in spite of demeaning himself now lately, his daughter must count upon having to behave like a lady, and not going to and fro, and in and out with the other young folk; as the butcher's, and grocer's girls might do.

And who was there likely to ask her in marriage, or to take her to a dance, or a fairing, or a club, comely as she was, and so nice-spoken? Why, Parson Tom Short was the only gentry-man, unless you went so far as Touchwood Park; and if ever there was a set bachelor in the world, Parson Short was one of them; let alone that his hair was all going from his poll, and his cook, Mrs. Aggett, would have no young doings.

Up to the present time, however, though their life had jogged as leisurely as Pugsley's horse, Rose Arthur had complained to no one, of discontent, or loneliness. Her father, and her work, and books, sufficed to her for company; and her lively nature filled itself with interest in all things. She knew everybody in the village now, and every flower in the garden; and her father's lonely life was blessed by her young enjoyment of the world.

Pugsley (who lived at Moreton, and traded twice a week from Exeter, when the weather and the roads encouraged him) now began to find his horse wink one eye, at the turn towards Christowell. So many trifles went to and fro, and some boxes that made the axle creak, and some quite large enough to sit upon. Even before this, he had taken mauns of plants, and baskets of choice pears, and grapes to Exeter; when the captain began to "demean" himself in the village esteem by traffic. But now the commerce increased, and throve, as Rose threw her young life into it.

If Pugsley had been a small-minded man, he must have gone promptly to Tavistock fair, and bought a new horse to attend to this traffic; for his ancient nag, whose name was "Teddy," began to find the hills grow steeper, as the weight of years increased. But the carrier was of gentle tone, and largely generous sentiments; and hours of reflection made him wipe his head with loftier feeling Therefore he would not deny his good neighbours the pleasure of

benevolence, but allowed them to lend him a horse as often as they wished, and sometimes oftener.

Now Teddy was crawling up the hill, that beautiful April morning, with the long-desired load of pots. Three-quarters of a mile of jagged lane, or sometimes of roaring watercourse, led from the village to "Larks' Cot," as irreverent people called it. At best, and even for a fresh young horse, it was a tough piece of collar-work; but Teddy, ancient though he was, would never have grumbled, if the lane had been wide enough for corkscrew. But in this part of Devon, the rule of the road is, to make it just wide enough for one cart, and a cow to go past it without losing milk. If two carts meet, one must back to a gateway; and whether of the twain shall back, depends upon the issue which of the drivers is "the better man."

Therefore this Teddy had a hard time of it—a long pull, a strong pull, and worst of all, a straight pull. And while he was pausing, to pant, and to think, and his master whistled softly, Jem Trickey, the cobbler, came merrily down a steep place, and stopped to look at them.

"Marnin' to 'e, Tim," shouted Trickey, for his breath was as "plim" as a football newly filled; "what have e' got then, this time, carryer?"

"No consarn of thine, Cobbler Trickey;" Pugsley made stout answer, being cross, and short-fetched in the wind; "cobblers is not excisemen yet."

"Potses, and panses again, as sure as I be a zinner! Cappen Larks ought to be ashamed of hiszelf. Lor' A'mighty never made his works to grow in crockery. And you'm a gwain outside your trade. Backard and forrard is your proper coorse. Let me conzeider of they potses."

"Ye be welcome to conzeider of them, cobbler. A niver zeed sich coorous cloam. Look'e yeer, they little holes hurneth all round 'em! Cappen's own diskivry, I do hear tell."

The carrier loosened the cord of one crate, and allowed the intelligent Trickey to gaze, while he drew it towards the cart-tail. Trickey, though large enough of mind, was small of body; and he lifted himself by the lade, to see things justly.

"You be bound by my advice," he cried, retreating hastily; "you take the next turn down to brook, and heft they into the watter. They was made for the witches, and no mistakk about 'em."

"Zo I wull," Tim Pugsley answered, pretending to share his

neighbour's fright, for he was a dry man, and full of book-learning. "Thank'e kindly for thy counsel, Jem. Into the watter they gooth, zure enough. Only thou must pay for the vally of 'em, and the carryage too, Cobbler Trickey."

"Go thy way with thy witchcraft," the other replied. "Do 'e know what I call thee, Carryer Pugsley? I call thee a poor time-sarver, and a carryer of no conzistency."

"I carry better stuff than thou dost," Pugsley shouted after him; as the shoe-maker, with a springy step, set off down the hill, for fear of worse. "Do I zwindle the public with brown papper? Do I putt 'ooden pegs in, and zwear they be stitched? Do I clam on the heel-ball, to hide my scamping? Do I——"

Master Pugsley cut short his list of libels, as he saw Master Trickey, at a decent distance, deliver a gesture of supreme contempt, by turning up his coat-tail, and administering a slap to the quarter of his body which was latest in retreat.

"Do e' do the like of that to I?" the carrier inquired superfluously. "If it twadn't for business, and the blessed law—howsomever, a bain't worth thinking on; Teddy, gee wugg! It be your vault mainly."

The old horse, wont as he was to bear the blame of troubles far outside of his own shafts, rallied with a shiver, and a rattle of his chains, and threw himself forward upon the strain. For a very stiff tug arose just here, for a horse who had been to Exeter and back, with a tidy load, only yesterday; and whose knowledge of corn was too superficial, getting more of the husk than the kernel for its study. And the manner of a Devonshire lane is such, that dogmatic humps stand up, in places, where nothing seems to warrant them. The meadows, to the right and left, may be as pleasant as you please to walk upon, with a sleek benevolence, a velvet pile, and a spring of supple freshness. And yet, within a landyard the lane is jumping scraggily, with ribs of solid rock, and pits and jags of bold abruptness. The nag, being born to such conditions, plodded on without repining; but in spite of all spirit, and skill, and care, he suddenly fell into sad disgrace.

For just as the near wheel was creaking, on the verge of a steep slide of granite, where his turn-about was due—for the lane there allowed him chance of a little bit of slanting—Teddy did a thing that any other horse might do, or even a man in his position. He mistook a large stone-fly, just arisen from the Christow, for a genuine æstrus, a bot-fly, whame, or tabanus. If he had thought of the present time of year, he must have known better; but instead

of thinking, he acted on his nerves, which struck into him like a spur. Up went his head, as if he were four years old, instead of going on for forty ; and his old bones shook with indignation, at the pestilent state the world was come to. "Steady, you old fool! Who'm a-gwain for to kill'e?" the carrier exclaimed with a little friendly thump ; but the mischief was done, while he was speaking. For the jump of the horse gave a jerk to the shaft, and this ran amiss into the axle-tree, gave a lollop to the near wheel, already on the wamble ; and down went the felly, with a blue grind of iron, into the very hole they meant to shun. The hole was more than deep enough to hold a good nine gallons ; and the wheel ground down into its deepest depth, while the other took advantage of the position for a holiday, and proved itself the off-wheel, by going off towards heaven.

"Wull now!" said the carrier, without much haste, for his mind travelled slowly up the obstacles of thought ; "this be a tarble dickyment ; and here coom'th arl the cloam! Drat that old cobbler chap, 'twor arl his doings."

An avalanche of pots, from the unroped crate, fell around him and upon him, while he reasoned thus. Like a quick shower of acorns from the shaken oak, but alas, much heavier, and more valuable, they rattled on the carrier, and thumped his poor chest, and a far more tender and impassioned part of man, till he fairly turned back, and let them roll upon his spine.

"Jem, neighbour Jem, do'e come back, that's a dear ;" he shouted, as loud as his drummed condition furnished, to the cobbler in the distance at the bottom of the hill. That good neighbour not only heard him, but replied right pleasantly, with a gladsome laugh, and a smart repetition of his gay defiance ; then hastened on his course, with a step more nimble than his customers generally could compass from his shoes.

"All men is clay," said the carrier, recovering his native equanimity, and wiping the red dust from his fustian suit ; "all men is clay ; and the Lord hath not intended us to putt His material into these here shapes, with a C. R. upon 'em, maning carrier's risk. Wull, a carn't brak' no more of 'un nor there be, now can'e, Teddy? Smarl blame to thee, old chap. We'll both of us toorn to our brexass. This hosebird job hath coom, I rackon, 'long of doing of despite to the gifts of the Lord."

Beholding a very nice place to sit down, and content with the cart in its present firm fixture, he pulled out the nosebag, and buckled it for Teddy, so that he might cast one eye down at his

lip-service. Then he drew forth his own provender, and seasoned it, by dwelling on its beauties with his broad brown thumb. "Nation good, nation good!" he could not help exclaiming; "a good waife is the making of a man's front-piece. A vartuous woman laveth no occasion for a man to think twice of his vitteling, or zeek to read the papper. Best use of papper is to putt up bakkon in 'un."

Sorrow, and breakage, and the other plagues of life, began to use less and less of pressure on his heart, as he sat upon a lady-fern (not yet plumed for dancing, but rich with soft beauty for a heavy man to sit upon) and biting out the cork from a flat stone bottle, moistened down the roadway for the bread and meat to follow. Then he fell to very heartily, and in less than an hour began to feel nicely refreshed, and fit to encounter the issue before him.

CHAPTER III.

PARSON SHORT.

"I AM almost sure that he must have broken down," said the fairest of his flowers to the gardener; "he is the most punctual man in the county, and scarcely ever more than three days late. I saw him not more than three miles off, on the top of the hill above Lustleigh, before the sun was three yards high; and he must have been here, wiping his head, as a delicate hint for cider, two hours ago, if he had gone on well."

"Perhaps he has gone on too well, my dear, by taking the turn to the *Three Horse-shoes*. Not that I would cast any slur upon your pet; but still such things will happen."

"To other people perhaps they might. But never to him—I am quite sure of that. The last time I saw him, he lamented cordially 'the mischief of them publics.'"

"That was very good of him, and showed high principle, as well as a tender conscience," Mr. Arthur replied, while he took good care that his daughter should not observe his smile; for life enough was before her yet, for correction of faith in human nature. "Pugsley has the elements of a lofty character, industry, honesty, philosophy—in the sense of that word at present."

"Father," cried Rose, having finished her bunch, and running up to him, with the long grape-scissors in her hand, and a trail of bast

around her neck; "have I got the elements of a lofty character—industry, certainly, just look at those ten bunches; honesty, perhaps to a reasonable extent; but scarcely a bit of philosophy, I'm afraid?"

"Certainly not too much of that," her father answered quietly; "but run in, and see about the breakfast, darling; or perhaps you may discover some defects in mine."

"How I wish that I could! But I shall never do that, if philosophy means good temper. Now come and see my work, sir, and say if it is good."

"It is good sound work; far better than Lord Bicton's head-gardener, at any money, could produce, in vineries like a cathedral. However it is not faultless yet; though I don't mean to say, that I could do it better, even if my eyes were as young as yours. You understand thoroughly the bunch, as it is; and you shape it beautifully for the time; nothing could be neater, or more justly placed. But you have yet to learn the fine perception of the future, the bending of the footstalk, as the berries grow in weight, and the probable drop of the shoulders. And practice alone can teach you the different ins and outs of each kind of grape, in swelling."

"The subject appears to me to be endless. How shall I ever attain to such knowledge?"

"By watching the results of your own work, and by never giving over."

"Till old experience do attain to something like prophetic strain. But father, how did you thus attain it? Have you ever been apprenticed to a gardener?"

"Little pitchers may have long ears, but they must not have curious tongues!" he replied, with a kiss on her forehead, to heal the rebuke. "Now let us go to breakfast; and then seek Pugsley."

Hence it came to pass, that while the good carrier, with calm eyes, and well-kindled pipe, was still regarding the position of his cart, and the attitude of his ancient horse, a spirited young lady stood before him, and did not share his patience.

"Good morning, Master Pugsley; and you seem to think it good. But I always have understood, that a cart ought to stand upon both wheels."

"So her did. You'm right there, Miss," the carrier answered, with a quiet grin. "But there be times when her dothn't do her dooty, but go'oth contrairy, like the wominvolk."

"And you mean to let her stay like that, for ever! And my father's pots lying in a heap upon the road!"

"Cappen is a just man, and a' wull look auver it. Partikler now you've zeed it, Miss, and can sartify 'twor no hooman doin's."

"All I can certify is, that you seem content to stay here for the rest of the day. Do please to get out of that hole at once, and bring all the pots you have managed not to break."

"Lor', how natteral you do spake! It doth a man good to hear'e, Miss. Here we must baide, nolum wolum, till such taime as Farmer Willum coom'th."

"Farmer William may not come at all, or at any rate not till twelve o'clock. Now do put your shoulder to the wheel yourself. I am very strong, and I will help you."

The carrier was too polite to laugh, though he cherished that disdain of female prowess, against which the chivalrous author of "Dorothy" couches his elegiac lance. But this man only puffed the pipe of silence.

"You fancy that I can do nothing, I suppose," cried Rose, who was as prickly as a moss-rose, when provoked; "but I can do a whole quantity of things, such as would quite surprise you. I can milk a cow, and pot a vine, and bed down a pony, and salt a silverside, and store apples, and fry potatoes, and fill a pipe. And if all that is nothing, as you might be apt to think, because of being a man, Mr. Pugsley, I can answer for taking a hive of bees, without hurting one of them. Can you do that?"

"The Lord forbid! He hath made 'em to be smoked, zoon as ever they a' done their work. But, Missy, it amooseth me to hear you tell up. You tell up a sight of things, as a well-inventioned man can do, or if not one, mebbe then anither of 'em. But you never tak' no count on the hardest thing of arl, the like of which no man can do in this here county. You knows what I mane, Miss Rose; and winderful it is to me, for sich a babe and suckling!"

"Oh! I know what you mean quite well. You have made me do it in the cart so often. But I do assure you that it is quite easy."

"Aisy a' can never be," said the carrier decisively; "although a' zimth as some can do 'un, droo years of arly larnin'. To play the piander is winderful; but a varmer's datter may coom to that, bein' outside of her dooty; but niver can her coom to spakin' of the bad Vrench langoowich."

"I tell you, Master Pugsley, that every one can do it, in my proper rank of life. You are not stupid enough to suppose that because I pot vines——"

"Noo, noo, Miss; axing of your pardon, for breaking in upon

you. I knows, as well as the Royal mail doth, that you be one of the karlity. None but a vule could look twice at you, and veel any doubt whatsomdever about that, my dear. And Cappen Larks, though he dooth quare things, is the very same; at any rate to my mind."

"And to everybody's mind, I should hope, Mr. Pugsley. But he must not, and he shall not be called 'Captain Larks;' as you know if nobody else does. Now please to get out of your rut, and come on."

The nature truly noble, and the mind of lofty power, reluctant as they always are to make disclosure of themselves, and shunning as they always do the frippery of random praise, unwittingly are revealed sometimes by the conduct of tobacco-smoke. Shallow men, or hasty fellows, or small sons of discontent, labour hard with restless puffs, and vex the air with turbid fumes, promiscuously tossed from lip or bowl. How different is the process of the large, self-balanced, contemplative pipe! No swirling tempest battles round the brow, no impetuous vapours cloud the air; but blue wreaths hover far asunder, circling placidly as they soar, like haloes round the head of peace; the cool bowl shines without perspiration, the halcyon of the charm and calm; and sweet rest satisfies the spirit of the man, gratefully ministering the gift divine.

In a state of mind thus serene and lofty, Master Pugsley smoked his pipe. Maiden impatience stirred him not, nor the casual shords of a slight mishap, nor the general fragility of human kind. If his cart was not upon a level axle, should that disturb his own equipoise? So he sat down again, in a courteous manner, and delivered very sound advice; while the young lady ran away, and left him to enjoy it, for she saw that help was near at hand.

Now a man of good sense, and strong will, led the simple people of Christowell. In any trouble, or turning of the mind, as well as in bodily ailments, there was not a grown-up man, or woman, who sought to go further than Parson Short. The Rev. Tom Short, vicar of the parish, coming to an utterly neglected place, had quietly made his way, by not insisting upon it noisily. Resolute good-will, plain speech, and fair allowance for adverse minds, together with a comfortable income of his own, enabled him to go on well, and to make his flock do likewise. He addressed them "on papper" only once a week, which was quite as much as they required; and that they did with diffidence. He, however, was well convinced of the mutual duty thereby discharged. No other preacher in the diocese could say so much in the time allowed,

which was never more than five minutes ; and no other congregation listened with attention so close, and yawns so few.

In other matters, his style was dry, and terse, and quick to the purpose ; yet seldom rough, and never arrogant or overbearing. Steadfast Tory as he was, he respected everybody's rights, and felt due sympathy for their wrongs, whenever he could see them. His education had been good, at Winchester, and New College ; whence he had taken high classical honours, though his college was then exempt from test. For his manner of sticking to the point at issue, and knowing nothing—unless he knew it well—was just what Oxford then encouraged. His bodily appearance was not grand, nor large, nor at all imposing ; and the principal weakness of his mind was a morbid perception of that defect. Not that he could be called a dwarf, or plain, or at all unsightly ; only that his spirit, being very great, had a hankering for larger tenement. This feeling perhaps had saved his freedom, by making him shy of long-bodied ladies, while it kept him from admiring short ones. So now he was nearing his fortieth year, with a prospect of nothing but bachelorhood ; which his cook was determined to maintain on his behalf. Yet many a young lady of exalted stature would gladly enough have become Mrs. Short.

For this was a ruddy, brisk, and very cheerful man, bald it is true, on the top of his head, but plenteously whiskered ; largely capable of beard—if clerical principles should ever close the razor, which they were beginning even now to do in London—gifted moreover with a very pleasant smile, a short waggish nose, and keen blue eyes. No better man could fill his shoes, or at any rate could get into them ; so well compressed was his material, and so good the staple.

It was not only this, nor yet the graceful increment of his income, nor even the possession of a spiritual turn, that led the young ladies to be thinking of him, whenever any settlement in life was mentioned. He inspired large interest by his own merit, but a feeling yet larger and deeper, by his present sad position. To rescue him from the despotism of Mrs. Aggett, his widowed cook, was the lofty aim of almost every other female. But he bore his yoke with patience, and preferred the known to the unknown ill.

"How now, Pugsley? Stuck fast like this, and the captain's pots smashed up like that!" this parson shouted, as he marched up briskly, saw the position, and understood the large resignation of the native mind.

"Stuck slow, I karls it, Passon Shart. And thicky clo'm be

smashed, more down than oop. If her baided oop, her wud 'a been all zound."

"Come, Master Tim, get out your levers, instead of argifying."

"Passon, I wull; if so be I've got 'un. The Lord know'th, whether they be here, or to home."

"Here they are, more peart than you be;" Mr. Short replied, turning up some old rubbish from the bottom of the cart, and drawing forth two spars of ash; "now wugg on, Teddy, when I give the word."

"No man as ever I see yet," said the carrier, through a blue ring of smoke, "hath received the power to make Teddy wugg, when a' hath his nosebag on; avore such time, as his tongue have been into the uttermost corners of the zame."

Parson Short, without any answer, unbuckled the strap of the hairy wallet, gently withdrew it from the old fellow's nose (though he put up one foot to protect it), and marching sternly up the hill, hung this fine temptation upon a hazel bush, at the first corner. Teddy, with a whinny of soft remonstrance, pricked up his ears, and looked anxious to proceed.

"Passons has no conscience whativer," said the carrier, pocketing his pipe; "they distresses all the hanimals, like the better sort, on Zindays. Niver lets nobody baide at peace."

"Cease from weak reflections, and take to action," the inexorable Short replied. "If your time is worthless, mine is not. Stir him up, Pugsley, while I start the wheel."

"I vear your reverence be a'most too small," said Pugsley, with much good-will, but touching the vicar in his most tender part. Mr. Short took off his coat, folded it carefully, and laid it on a rock-moot, because it was a very good one; then turning up shirt-sleeves of fair white linen, he showed a pair of arms as well-complexioned as a lady's, but thick-set, bossy, and substantial. "Lor' a' mussy," cried the carrier, "thou should'st niver have a gound on!"

Deigning no answer, the sturdy parson seized the bigger of the two ash staves, and laying the butt of the other for a fulcrum, gave the stuck wheel such a powerful heft, that the old cart rattled, and the crates began to dance.

"Zober, passon, zober! Or ee'll heft 'un over tother zide," said Pugsley, running up to the horse's head; "now, Teddy, taste thy legs, and strive at 'un."

At a touch of the whip on his legs, the old nag threw his chest out, and grappled the ground with his hoofs. Then he cast his

weight forward, and strained to the tug, with his back on the stretch, and his ribs like hoops, and even his tail stiffened up like a hawser

"Heave-oh!" shouted Parson Short, suiting the action to the word; "well done then, old horse, we are out of the hole!"

CHAPTER IV.

LARK'S COT.

CHRISTOWELL village (in full view of which, the horse, cart, and driver, had rested so long) affords to the places above it, or below, fair plea for contemplation. Many sweet beauties of tempered clime flower the skirts of the desolate moor, and the sweetest of these is Christowell. Even the oldest inhabitant cannot, to the best of his recollection, say, whether he ever did hear tell, that the place was accounted beautiful. He knoweth that picture-men do come, and set up three-legged things, and stand, as grave as judges, to make great maps, like them that be hanging in the schoolroom; but he never yet hath known any odds to come of it; the rocks abide the same, as if they never had been drawed, and the trees—you may look for yourself, and say whether they have fetched another apple. For when the Lord rested on Saturday night, His meaning was not, that the last of His works should fall to, and make strokes of the rest of them.

Sound sense of such lofty kind is the great gift of this village. Every man here would be contented, if he only had his due; failing of that, he keeps his merit to the mark of his wages, by doing his day's work gently. If a neighbour gets more than himself, he tries hard to believe that the man should have earned it; and even his wife is too good to declare, what she thinks of the woman next door to her. Among themselves sometimes they manage to fall out very cordially; but let anybody sleeping out of the parish, have an unbecoming word to say of his betters who are inside it, and if he walk here, without a magistrate behind him, scarcely shall he escape from the sheep-wash corner in the lower ham.

For a beautiful brook of crystal water, after tumbling by the captain's cot, makes its own manner of travelling here, rarely allowing the same things to vex it, or itself to complain of the same thing, twice. From crags, and big deserts, and gorges full of

drizzle, it has scrambled some miles, without leisure for learning self-control, or patience. And then it comes suddenly, round a sharp corner, into the quiet of Christowell, whose church is the first work of man it has seen, except that audacious cottage. Then a few little moderate slips, which are nothing, compared with its higher experience, lead it with a murmur to a downright road, and a ford where men have spread it gently, and their boys catch minnows. Here it begins to be clad with rushes, and to be chaired by jutting trees, and lintelled by planks, for dear gossip and love; for cottages, on either bank, come down, and neighbours full of nature inhabit them.

Happy is the village that has no street, and seldom is worried by the groan of wheels. Christowell keeps no ceremonial line of street, or road, or even lane, but goes in and out, as the manner of the land may be, or the pleasure of the landlords. Still there is a place where deep ruts grow, because of having soft rock under them; and this makes it seem to be the centre of the village, and a spot where two carts meet sometimes; for the public-house is handy. Once upon a time, two carts met here, and here they spent a summer's day, both being driven by obstinate men, who were not at all their owners. Neither would budge from his own rut, and the horses for several hours rubbed noses, or cropped a little grass, while the men lay down. Being only first cousins, these men would not fight; as they must have done, if they had been brothers. Yet neither of them would disgrace his county—fair mother of noble stubbornness—by any mean compromise, or weak concession; so they waited until it grew dark; and then, with a whistle of good will, began to back away together, and as soon as they found room to turn, went home to supper from a well-spent day.

But such a fine treat and stir of interest was rare, and the weather was the only thing that could be trusted for supplying serious diversion. Herein nobody was wronged of subject; for the weather was so active, that the hardest-working man could spend his time in watching it. No sooner had he said that it must be fine, than ere he could catch up his spade again, it was flying in his face, and he was eating his own words. Herein alone, is variety enough to satisfy people of contented heart. For scarcely ever did the same things look the same, for two hours together.

Upon a day of well-conducted weather, beginning brightly in the morning, a stranger newly arrived from town may feed, and gaze, alternately. At sunrise, he is in bed of course; largely saving the

disappointment, which the lavish promise of the east might bring. But even at eight of an average morning, when he wants his breakfast, the world is spread before him well, with soft light flowing up the plains, and tracing lines of trees, and bends of meadow. He stands, or sits down to his bacon and eggs, twelve hundred feet above sea-level, with fair land, and bright water, spreading three-fourths of the circle around him. To the east, some five leagues off, are the dark square towers of Exeter cathedral, backed by the hazy stretches of Black-down; on the right are glimpses of the estuary of Exe, from Powderham Castle towards Starcross. Outside them, and beyond, and overlapping every landmark, the broad sweep of the English Channel glistens, or darkens, with the moods above it, from the Dorset headlands to the Start itself. Before he has time to make sure of all this, the grand view wavers, and the colours blend; some parts retire, and some come nearer; and lights and shadows flow and flit, like the wave and dip of barley, feathering to a gentle July breeze. The lowland people descry herein the shadow of the forest as they call it; and the "Dartymorevolk," looking down upon them, are proud to have such a long "tail to the moor."

For the line of the land is definite here, as the boundary of a parish is. In many other parts it is not so, and the moor slopes off into farmland; but here, like the fosse of an old encampment, the scarp of the moor is manifest. Over this, that well-fed stream, the Christow, takes a rampant leap, abandoning craggy and boggy cradle, desolate nurture, and rudiments of granite, for a country of comparative ease, where it learns the meaning of meadow. And its passage, from rude into civilized life, occurs in the gardens of the "Captain." Brief is its course, and quickly run; for in the morass, where it first draws breath, three other rivers of wider fame arise, and go their several ways; and one of them, after twenty miles of crooked increase round the North, quietly absorbs poor Christow brook, and makes no gulp of acknowledgment. Without wasting one pebble in calculation, or a single furrow upon forethought, the merry brook hurries to whatever may befall it, and never fails to babble of whatever comes across it.

Now it happened that the vicar of the parish, Mr. Short, was a "highly temperate" man, as all who love cold water are supposed to be; although they may love many other things therewith. No sooner had he seen Master Pugsley up the hill, with a strong shove to second old Teddy's motion, than he left those two to go in, and deliver the relics of their cargo, and their own excuses.

"Do'e come in now, and break it to the cappen," the carrier vainly pleaded with him; "do'e, like a dear good minister."

"Tell your own lies, your own way," the parson answered pleasantly; "if I were there, I should have to contradict you."

"How partikkler you be—outzide of the pulpit!" said Pugsley with a sigh, yet a grin at his own wit.

Well seasoned to such little jokes, the vicar looked at him seriously, so that the carrier felt sorry for his wit; and then, with a smile, Mr. Short went back to the place where he had left his coat. This was just over against the pile of pots, which had found the ground too hard, and had lost all tenure of it for ever. Looking at these, as he donned his coat, the parson said, "Ha! The newest, I believe, of that wonderful man's inventions! Let me take the liberty of looking at the fragments." This he soon accomplished to his heart's content, but failed to make head or tail of them, because he was not a born gardener. Then he took up a shord of one rounded side and went down to the river, with that for his cup. Not that he felt any thirst, although he had worked very hard—for a parson; but that a certain school of doctors had arisen, and said that every man, who wished to live, must take his cold pint every morning of his life. Some ten years later, every man, desirous to prolong himself and his family, was bound to take four gallons, shed outside him. And now he takes shivering claret inside.

For the nostrums of the moment Mr. Short cared little; but people had praised him, for liking now and then a draught of cold water; and this made him try to do it. With his slip of pantile, as he called it (in large ignorance of garden ware), he passed through a gap in the hedge of the lane, and walked down to the brook, and scooped up a little drink.

Assuring himself how delicious it was, he was going to pitch the shord into the stream, when he spied on its inner rim certain letters, invisible until the cloam was wetted.

"What a queer thing! And how could it have been done?" he thought, as he began to peer more closely; and then he made out the words—"Pole's patent." He tried it, several times, and he turned it several ways; but nothing else was to be made of it. And presently his own surprise surprised him, for what was there marvellous in the matter? Nothing whatever; but it was rather queer that the brand should be inside the pot (which must have required a convex mould) and the name not that of Mr. Arthur, although the design was entirely his, as Mr. Short knew, from having seen the drawings.

"What a blessing for me that I am not gifted with much curiosity!" said the vicar to himself, as he turned the last corner of the lane, and sat down by the captain's gate, to wait till the carrier's job was done. "Nine out of ten of my brother clerks would have it on their conscience, to rout up this question. A mystery in one's own parish is a pest, when the man at the bottom of it comes to church. Otherwise one might wash one's hands. But this man is honest, and God-fearing, and a gentleman; and the only one fit to smoke a pipe with in the parish!"

Mr. Short sighed; for he liked his fellow-men, and was partly cut off from them by his condition, or at least by his own view of it. Though many of the moorland pastors still looked after their flock, in a gregarious manner, not disdaining their assemblage at the public-house sometimes. "Our mysterious friend," he continued, as he gazed, "not only has a very large amount of taste, but also much strategic power. How well he has made his garden fit the stream, so that the stream seems to follow the garden! Grass in the proper place, beds in the proper place, and trees planted cleverly to drink the water, and flourish like the righteous man! But greatest device of all, and noblest, because of its pure simplicity, the safeguard against morning calls, and the check to inquisitive ladies; for instance, Lady Touchwood. How I should like to know that man's history! Hi, there, Pugsley! Give me a lift over. I can't jump, as I used to do."

A man's resemblance to a tree has been discovered, and beautifully descanted upon—from nethermost tail of tap-root, to uttermost twig, and split sky-leaf—by hundreds of admirable poets. But thoroughly as these have worked out the subject, they seem to have missed one most striking analogy. A man (like a tree) can have no avail of comfort, unless there belongs to him the margin of a brook, to part him from the brambles, and the ruffle, and the jostle of the multitudinous thicket of the world.

"Lark's cot"—as Mr. Arthur's home was called by the natives, and even by himself, at last—was gifted with a truly desirable brook—the Christow, as aforesaid. The cot stood about a mile above the village, under a jagged tor, known as "the beacon," and in a south-eastern embrasure of the moor. This lonely, quiet, and delightful spot looked as if it ought to have no road to it, or at any rate none to go any further. Upon its own merits indeed, it never would have earned or even claimed a road: but it fell into the way of one, by a "causal haxident," as Devonshire people term it. For it happened, that one of the feeders of the main Roman road, across the desert,

helped itself up the steep labour of the heights, by the crooked balustrade of the Christow brook. This lane, every now and then, cold-shouldered the merriment of the brook, with a stiff dry hedge, and feigned to have nothing to do with it; yet times there were, and as much as a fortnight of Sundays in a downright season, when lane and brook made exchange of duty, as lightly as two parsons do. And the public,—so faithful to variety it proves—was pleased in this case, as it is in the other; and after a while found a new charm, in recurring to its veteran and inveterate ruts.

But in moderate weather, and decent seasons, the Christow keeps to its natural bed, strewn with bright pebbles, and pillowed with rock. Through the garden of the captain, its glittering run is broken, by some little zig-zags of delay, and many laughing tumbles; at one of which, it does some work, by turning a wheel, when driven to it. And when the gardener's day is done, and the sun is gone to the western world, while the apple with uplifted, and the pear with pensive eye, stand forth of their dim leafage, in the rounding of the light—then down here, by the fluid steps, and twinkling passage of the stream, a bench is hung with clematis, and tented round with roses, for leisure, and the joy of rest, and bliss of admiration.

Now dwelling here, and seeing how the land was in his favour, the captain helped the hand of nature, to secure his quietude. The cliff on the west of his garden had offered possibility of descent, to ladies of clear head, and strong ankle. This bad temptation he soon removed, by a few charges of rock-powder; and then towards the north, where the ground was softer, he planted a brake of the large-flowered gorse, having thorns of stiff texture and admirable teeth. The bloom of this was brighter than the fairest maiden's tresses, even of the now most fashionable ochre; and the rustle of the wind, among the tufts, was softer than the sweetest silvery nonsense.

Thus he well established ramparts, solid and spinous, all about his rear; and then he had leisure to improve his front, and eastern flank towards the village. Nature had defended these, truly and honestly enough, by sending a nice watercourse around them. Still there were lapses in the vigilance of the brook, where a lady, with her skirts up, might flip through, or even, with a downward run, spring over; and having much experience of the fair, he knew how slow they are to hesitate, with curiosity behind them. So, with a powerful spade, and stout dredging-rake, he made good those weak places; and then looking round, with glad defiance, suddenly espied at his very threshold a traitorous inroad, a passage for the evil one. For here was a series of wicked stepping-stones,

coming across a shallow width of water, as old as the hills, and looking quite as steadfast. Strictly heeding these, and probing vigorously with a crowbar, he found one towards the further side, which was loose in its socket, like a well-worn tooth; and after a little operation, he contrived to leave a fine gap in the series. Curiosity on tiptoe might come thus far, but without winged toes or wading boots, was sure of catching cold, if it came any further. Thus a gentleman's wife, from a parish down below, who kept the spy-glass of the neighbourhood, was obliged to stop there ; and at once pronounced him a vastly superior, and most interesting man, but undoubtedly a noted criminal.

CHAPTER V.

AMONG THE BUDS.

"How beautiful everything looks, and how large and early all your bloom is! People may talk about Torquay. But I was down there yesterday, and I find you a week in front of them. Well done, Christowell! Torquay has not a pear-bloom open yet, even in Morgan's garden. But perhaps you grow the earlier sorts."

Parson Short, and Captain Larks, were hearty friends by this time ; for each of them loved the truthful staple, and kindly heart of the other. The clergyman had too much self-respect, to pry into the layman's history. He took him as he found him, a gentle, intelligent, peaceful, and orthodox ratepayer.

"The earliest fruit is not the first to bloom," the gardener answered, with his pruning-knife at work ; "or at any rate, not of necessity. The later kind often is the first in bloom."

"Well, I never knew that. But I see the reason. Slow fellows want a good start, as in a race. I like to hear of little things, that I have never noticed ; for an apple and a pear are pretty much the same to me. And that reminds me of the thing I came to ask you. Yesterday I rode down to Torquay, because the dog *Nous* wanted exercise ; and there, upon the pier, I met an ancient friend, whom I value and admire greatly. By the death of an uncle, he has come into a large estate, on the west side of the moor ; and there he is going to improve the garden. He has never had a chance of gardening much ; but he loves it, almost as much as you do, especially the fruit, and the vegetable stuff. He knows next to

nothing about it; but that adds enormously to the enchantment. He has heard of you as a mighty man of fruit, from nurserymen near Exeter. And instead of burning, as he should have done, to come and see me, the parson, all he seemed to care about was to see you; you, the gardener, and your garden."

"I ought to be obliged to him, even more than I am," Mr. Arthur answered plainly. "One of the many plagues of gardening is that the public regard it as a mere amusement, which is carried on, for them to stare at, like cricket on the village-green. The general idea of a garden is—a place to sit down in, and smoke pipes."

"And the right view of the subject too," replied Mr. Short who understood his man, and how soon his petulance broke up into a smile. "My friend, I will take your hint. My pipe is ready. I will sit, and watch your labours, and learn much."

"That you will never do," the other answered, smiling at the turn of the mood upon him; "simply because it is not in you. From morning till night, you might think you were watching, and go away, not a twig the wiser, because you were not born for it; any more than I for Greek verbs, and pithy sermons. Why do I cut to this bud now? I have told you fifty times, but you cannot tell me now."

"Slash away all the buds," said Mr. Short, for fear of making a wrong hit at it; "so long as you know, and the bud understands it—but here comes the fairest bud of all, my little Rose-bud—how are you, my dear? And why does your father cut back to you? Is it because you grow in the right direction?"

"I have stopped growing long ago in every direction;" she answered, looking far away above the hat of Mr. Short; for her views of life were becoming large; and it liked her not to be called "my dear," even from the force of habit. And then she feared that she had gone too far, especially in looking such a height above him. So she blushed, in true penitence,—and was almost ready to offer her father's friend a kiss, as used to be done of old, when she met him on the first morning of the holidays. But the vicar took no offence, and heeded not her communings, for he did not want to enter into young girls' minds.

"Now what would this child do, to express her gratitude"—he put it to her father with a nod of understanding; "supposing that I were to bring her a hero? A genuine hero, of valour and of chivalry, such a man as she has only dreamed of—or perhaps read about him, and got tired."

"I never get tired of reading of heroes; and how could I get tired of looking at them?"

"That is quite another pair of shoes, Miss Rose. My friend is not wonderful to look at, as the men seldom are, who have wrought great wonders. But you could not help liking and admiring him, because he does it to himself so little. And he will admire you, I can tell you. Coax your dear father to let me bring him."

"My poor little place, and my puny experiments," Mr. Arthur said, with that large humility, which marks the true gardener (as long as he is praised), "are always at the service of the lover of the craft, who is good enough to think, that I can teach him something. At the same time, it must be kindly borne in mind, that I am but a learner, and make no pretence to knowledge."

"To be sure, my dear sir. All allowance will be made. We cannot, for instance, expect you to be like the great Scotch gardener, at Lord Bicton's place."

"It would grieve me, and disgrace me, to be like that fellow. I would not let him come here, with his crooked-bladed knife, if he paid me £5 a day for it. Miserable numskull!"

"Even I should know better than to do what he does," cried Rose, running up to a fine pear-tree. "He nails the young wood of a wall-tree down the trunk, like this positively; and drives the great nails into the poor thing's breast!"

"Excellent idea!" cried Mr. Short, laughing at the horror on the maiden's face. "So he makes the tree really self-supporting; and it feeds its young, like a pelican, out of its own breast."

"No; it feeds the nails, like that," she answered; "the great rusty nails, and the dirty weeds, and snails; and no nourishment for the poor fruit at all. Oh, Mr. Short, how very little you do know!"

"How may I attain to such rare knowledge? If I only had the stuff in me, you might improve it. But alas! I have not the most raw material. But my old friend across the moor has got the making in him; and he seems to see the principles, if he could only get the practice."

"So far as concerns my scraps of knowledge, and my humble premises," the owner answered, as he looked about him, with no other flourish than a clapping of his clips; "they are wholly at the service of a friend of yours. It will give me great pleasure to see him, when he pleases. And if you will let me know the day, I will have my little drawbridge down."

"Now, I call that really kind of you; because I know that you

are pressed for time just now. And that made me enlist little Rosie on my side. I will write at once to Colonel Westcombe; he will ride over to my early dinner, at which I shall be proud if you, and your dear child, will join us. Then we will have the old four-wheel out, and come up the hill all together."

"Oh, what a pleasure it will be! Papa, you had better not say 'No'; or you never shall hear the last of it. But what have you discovered so important in the brook? Is it a salmon? No, they can't get up here. It must be the otter once more. Mr. Short, oh do come with *Nous*, and your double-barrelled gun."

"It is not at all an easy thing to shoot an otter," said the parson, a dear lover of the rod and gun; "but if you have an otter here, he will harry your trout dreadfully. The only way to get a shot is to lie hid for hours. *Nous* would do more harm than good, freely as he takes the water. But, Arthur, you understand all that. I am sure that you are an old sportsman."

"I used to be fond of the gun," said his host; "but I never shoot now; and shall never shoot again."

Mr. Short was surprised at the tone of his voice, and the change in his face and manner. What was become of his frank complacence, and light smile at his own conceit, and glances of fatherly pride at his Rose? Instead of all that, he looked troubled, and perplexed, and preparing to contend with some new grief. Even his lively child saw this; though as yet she had not learned to study a face, whose only expression for her was love.

"I fear that I have vexed you," the clergyman said kindly; "by striving to draw you from your good and quiet habits. I can well understand your dislike to be disturbed, such as I very often have myself. Leave it to me to settle with Colonel Westcombe. I can easily do it, without offending him. The fault has been wholly my own, for not considering. I hope that you will pardon me; and I am sure that Westcombe will; for he is one of the noblest-hearted fellows living."

"That he is. Right well I know it," Mr. Arthur answered, with more warmth than prudence. "But, alas, what a number of my pots are broken! Let us go in. The sun is droughty. We have hit upon a most prime blend of cider; but I dare not bottle any, till I have your *imprimatur*."

"You shall have the full benefit of my judgment," the parson answered briskly; "after the tug of the morning, I deserve even better than Christow water. My acquaintance with fruit is chiefly

liquid, in spite of all your lectures. Miss Rose, answer me one question, if you can; and young ladies now-a-days are taught all paradoxes. Why should milk become solid, and apples liquid, by the self-same process of thumping?"

"Because, because—because I don't know. And can you explain to me, Mr. Short, how a man can be beaten black, and blue? If he is black, he can never be blue."

"Nothing can be simpler. At first he is black; and as he begins to get better, he turns blue."

Such nonsense they were talking, not of their own folly, but simply to carry off the awkward time, as they followed Captain Larks to the cottage. He turned round, now and then, to seem to heed them; but they knew, better than himself perhaps, that his mind was far away, and that his cheerfulness was gone. Then he roused up his spirits, to discharge fair duties as a host, at which he was always good, with the very few whom he received as guests. His graceful young daughter, with her hat thrown off, and clusters of nut-brown hair tied back, flitted across the bars of sunshine chequered by some Banksian sprays, while she spread upon the table shadow, and still better, substance of the things that nourish life. Bread, that is to say, and butter (beaded as with meadow dew); honeycomb, gladdened with the moorland scent, and the thick-set mettle of a home-fed ham, where fat and lean played into one another sweetly—like moonlight among roses. In the thick of temptation reposed Cos-lettuce—cold and crisp, and beautiful, and justly divided by a thin, sharp knife, showing follicle, frill, and crimp broidery of gold, in and out of cells, and fronds, and filigree of carved ivory. Neither were the fluid creatures absent; cider was there, like an amber fountain springing into beads of pearl, and bright ale, comrade of the labours of mankind; and, for the weaker vessels, water. Not yet was vapid claret shed, like vinegar on the English rock.

Distributing good supply, and partaking fairly to commend it, the host began to regard the world, with larger benevolence, and hope. He looked at his child, who was doing her best to smile away sudden disturbance, and to set their visitor at his ease; and then he looked at this pleasant friend, who had shown such good breeding, and submission to his mood. And with that, Mr. Arthur was fain to confess, that he had allowed himself to be surprised out of his usual respect for others.

The vicar, (although a testy man, with strangers, or with upstarts,) not only did not show, but did not even feel resentment now. He

had faith in his friend, that there must be sound reason for the refusal of his request; and he fully expected some explanation, perhaps when Rose should be out of the way. So he thoroughly enjoyed the simple fare, and resolved to enrage his cook, Mrs. Aggett, by a fulsome description of the captain's ham. For this he deserved to have his banquet interrupted, and so it was very speedily.

"Well, I do declare," cried the quick-eyed Rose, as she helped him to some honey for the crown of his repast, "the very queerest figure that you can imagine is trying to get across our steps!"

"Ungrateful damsel!" Mr. Short replied, as he went to the bud-covered lattice. "Have you no sense of a most distinguished honour? It is the mighty Solomon, and he bears a letter."

"Surely you don't mean Betty Cork's boy, who went about for Doctor Perperaps? The one that rose into the 'loftier spear'?"

"To be sure; Lady Touchwood's page he is. And she so arrays him, that our wag, the cobbler's boy, who used to call him 'Solomon Senna,' now has dubbed him 'Solomon's Glory.'"

"Glorious he may be," said Rose; "but he seems in a very sad fright at present; and he cannot take my jump. Father, dear, shall I go, and ask him what he wants?"

"After all, the honour is not for you, but my humble self," interposed Mr. Short. "He is screaming at the top of his voice 'Passon Shart.' Don't think of letting down the drawbridge. I will make him walk through, just to spoil his grand livery."

"Oh, if you are not afraid of 'my lady,' do make him walk through the water, while I see him."

"Rose, you are too mischievous," said Mr. Arthur getting up. "I will go and take the boy's message myself. We must not carry things too far."

In a minute or two, he returned with a letter, sealed with a formidable coat of arms, and addressed to "The Revd. Tom Short, Christowell Vicarage. *Important.*"

"Plague upon the woman!" cried the reverend gentleman; "she wants me on the instant, about something most momentous! And Mrs. Aggett has been stupe enough to send the boy on here. It is nothing but one of her little tempers. However, I must go home, and ride away at once, though my horse is entitled to a good day in stable."

"I wanted to show you a whole quantity of things," replied his host with unfeigned disappointment; for the bloom of the pleasure of good work fades, when nobody comes to admire it. "It is more than a fortnight since you were here; and a fortnight of April is as

much as a month, at almost any other time. And if you care little for fruit, you love flowers."

"The rose, the rose, the rose for me!" Mr. Short exclaimed, with a smile at the blushing specimen before him. "I shall write you the song of the rose some day. I know a little Rose, who considers me a nightingale. Even so, I must fly immediately. May I let down the planch for myself, good host?"

They would not hear of this, but bore him company down the winding walk; where the pear-tree was clustering its petal'd cups of snow, and the apple beginning, in the slant sunshine, to unravel the down of its bossy green truss. Then the gardener himself let down his "planch," over the wavering glitter of the brook; and crossing the meadow, where Mopsy the cow lived, they came to the private door into the lane. Here Christowell shone, in the haze of spring below them, and the hoary old church, beyond the flash of hasty waters, looked holy, and peaceful, as the tombs around it.

"Be sure that you come again soon," cried Rose, running lightly back to the lane, while her father was going home across the mead. "Please to come to-morrow, if you possibly can, and tell us every syllable about that Lady Touchwood; she puzzles me so dreadfully, Mr. Short!"

"Lady Touchwood will say, when she hears where I have been, 'Tell me every syllable about that Miss Arthur; she is such a puzzle to me, Mr. Short!'"

No sooner had he spoken than he deeply regretted his stupid little slip of tongue; because he saw that he had given pain. Rose made no answer, but coloured deeply, and turned away with a curtsey; then, rejoining her father, she clung closely to his arm.

"Poor dear!" thought the vicar, who loved his light-hearted, and sweet parishioner, pastorally, "I heartily trust, that I am altogether wrong. But if I know anything of the world, that pretty girl, and good girl, has a troublous time before her."

CHAPTER VI.

A TINGLE AND A TANGLE.

TOUCHWOOD PARK, as the owners loved to call it, differed from Lark's Cot, almost as much as Sir Joseph Touchwood from "Captain Larks." Brilliance without shade, but striped, and barred with brighter brilliance, and slashed across with all bold

hues (in diaper pattern, glittering like a newly-varnished oil-cloth) with stucco pilasters to relieve it (but all too shallow to help themselves, or carry their white perukes of piecrust), and topped with a stuck-up roof of tile, and puckered things called "minarets," but more like stable-lanterns—the gazer found solace in shutting both eyes, and hoping that the money had done good elsewhere.

"Winderful to my maind, winderful they arktexts be!" said John Sage, of Christowell, to his wife. "Blest if they han't diskivered a plan, to make tower of Babel, out of Noah's rainbow!"

"What odds to thee?" replied his good wife sharply; "our Bill hath drawed his ladder wages, riglar, every Zatterday."

Truly, it made small difference to the quiet folk of Christowell, whether the mansion were tall or short, dazzling or soothing to the eye; because it was out of their parish—which marks a broad line in all matters of feeling—and also, because it was out of their sight, till they mounted a gristly and scraggy bone of hill. Some of them looked upon this as a great denial, and grumbled, at going so far, to see the big house on a Sunday. But most people said it was wisely ordained, lest the liver'd young men should come courting their daughters, and drive up the price of beer at the *Horse-shoes*.

Sir Joseph Touchwood had a right to please himself; as indeed he always did, having vast self-complacence, which was justified by his success in life. Beginning his career, as a boy of all work, he had made his way into a little grocer's shop at Stonehouse, and so into the Pursers' rooms, and thence into Admiralty contracts, lucrative, and elastic. He cheated as little as he could help, until he could do it, on a worthy scale, and in superior company.

Rising thus, he was enabled, by-and-by, to be the superior company himself, to reward those who helped him, and make it more expedient, to shake the head, than to wag the tongue about him. And little as he cared for the shadow, or even the sparkle of his object, while he grasped the substance, the showy part also was rendered to him, by a pleasing and natural incident.

Lord Wellington's men having worn out their shoes, by constant pursuit of the enemy, our Government took measures to prepare to shoe them, by the time they had learned to march barefoot. Joseph Touchwood got the contract; his beef had been found of such durable texture, that the hides, in all reason, must last for ever. The order was placed in Northampton; the shoes were made in a jiffy, and came to Plymouth, two-and-twenty thousand of them, all of a size, not in pairs, but polygamous; being shaped so

admirably, as to fit either human foot alike. They passed a triumphant examination, and were happily shipped to a Spanish port, which fell into the hands of Marshal Soult, on the very day of their arrival.

That great commander rejoiced exceedingly; for his men were bare-footed, from running away; and he rigged out eleven thousand Gallic heroes, in captured British leather—or the like. On the very next day, a great battle came off and the right side won it,—that is to say, ours. Then every Frenchman (shot, lanced, or taken prisoner) was proved to be as lame as a cock on a glassed wall; and although no allowance was made for that drawback, the hand of Providence was discovered in it. It was useless for Touchwood to deny that he had foreseen this result, and produced, at great outlay, a patriotic stratagem. In a word, with no more waste of time, than was needful for the British Cabinet to conceive, ponder, and deliver a large budget of jokes at the Frenchman's expense, of his vain attempt to fill British leather, and getting into the wrong pair of shoes, etc.—amid public applause, they made the contractor a baronet, instead of paying him.

Sir Joseph would liefer have received the money; for the shoes stood him fairly in 9*d.* a-piece; and he counted for a further loss his non-gain of three shillings, upon every one of them. He had no honest ground for complaint however, having run a good cargo of French goods homeward, as well as established a permanent basis for supplying the French, through the rest of that campaign, with slop-flannel trousers, as blue as their legs.

Sir Joseph worked harder than ever, although universally respected by this time. And though he cared little for empty honour, he loved fame, when it led to business. Lady Touchwood began to think more of his opinion, and allowed him no longer to be called, "our Joe." He flourished exceedingly; but stuck to business still, and left all the decorative part to her. This lady was an admirable wife, and mother, kind, warm-hearted, full of interest in things that were no concern of hers, an excellent adviser, when not consulted, as good to the poor as they would let her be, vigilant in her own household, and resolute in having her own way always. The most captious of critics could find no fault in her, except that she was obstinate, imperious, narrow-minded, and ridiculously passionate, when "put out." And a very little thing was enough to put her out; though she always believed it to be monstrous.

"Now I call it very good of you, to come to me so promptly;" she exclaimed, holding out both hands to Mr. Short. "I always

like people to do that, so much. Never mind anything. Do sit down."

Mr. Short bowed pleasantly, but made no pretty speech; though the ladies still expected such politeness from the gentlemen. For he knew that this lady would only cut short his oration.

"I am the most persecuted person in the world," she continued, glancing sadly at a statuette of Dido; "no, she was not to be compared to me, and she did burn the villain who betrayed her!"

"Sir Joseph?" inquired Mr. Short with some surprise, but too wary to correct the lady's memory of the Æneid.

"Sir Joseph! How can you be so exceedingly provoking? Sir Joseph is a model; and besides that, he knows better. It is my daughter, Julia."

"I am grieved indeed," Mr. Short said softly, and dropping his eyes, lest they should gleam with any levity. "The young lady promised to behave so well; and she seemed so truly sorry, so affectionate, and dutiful, after having shown a little—temper perhaps, on Monday."

"Then, you shall hear how she has kept her promise. This morning, without provocation or excuse, she packed up all her property, and she left my house!"

"Surely, there must have been something more than usual?"

"Not at all. You shall judge for yourself. She is constantly pretending to have judgments of her own, and to use what she calls her reasoning powers. No good ever comes of such a thing as that. But she is at liberty to do it, when she pleases; so long as she only agrees with me. But to argue against her own mother, Mr. Short!"

"Lady Touchwood, I agree with you, that it is wrong. But of course, with your superior intellect, you convinced her of her error."

"That I did thoroughly. I boxed her ears; until they were as red as the things they make sauce of. Oh, it was such a satisfaction to me!"

Mr. Short stared a little, though he knew the lady's temper. Then he thought of the haughty tall Julia, whom he admired with a distant fervency. Julia, with her pretty ears as red as ripe tomatoes!

"I hurt my poor hands shockingly, with her nasty brilliants. It was too bad of her." Lady Touchwood exhibited her dimpled, but vigorous palms, with pink lines on them. "She went to bed, as I thought, in a chastened spirit; and I told her to pray, for a better frame of mind. But instead of that, she has done what I tell you."

"But you know where she is? You have ascertained that, otherwise you would be in great tribulation. Is she gone to her father, at Plymouth?"

"Not she indeed. Sir Joseph has too much high principle, to encourage her; though he would, no doubt, if he dared; because she can do exactly as she likes with him."

"Then perhaps, to her aunt at Ivybridge? I am sure that you know; or you would be more sorry for what you have done, Lady Touchwood."

"I do the right thing, and I defy the consequence. But I know where the hussy is well enough. I ought to have taken her purse away. She has hired a post-chaise, and driven off forsooth, in noble state, to Westcombe Hall."

"To Colonel Westcombe's place! I had not the least idea, even that you knew him. I have spoken of him, and you made no sign." Mr. Short looked surprised, for he was thinking—"Well, you can hold your tongue, when you please, as well as people of better temper."

"Oh dear yes," replied Lady Touchwood, as if she were surprised at his surprise; "we have known Colonel Westcombe, for years and years, in fact he is Julia's godfather, and immensely proud she is of him. But circumstances—well you know, there was no particular reason why one should go running after him, until he came into that large property; and that, as you must be aware, was not at all expected."

"It is an honour to any one, to know Colonel Westcombe. Land, or no land, rich, or poor, no circumstances make any difference in his value."

"I dare say. But still, you know, it adds to his charms, to be in a good position. Sir Joseph was thinking of inviting him to dinner; but I must see first, how he behaves about my daughter. If he encourages poor Julia in her headstrong violence, and evil tempers, he shall never sit down in this house, Mr. Short."

"Whatever he does will be right, Lady Touchwood, whatever your opinion may be about it. And now, though I am not the clergyman of your parish, you have given me the right to speak, by sending for me. And setting aside all the folly of your conduct, I must tell you, that it is very wrong."

Mr. Short spoke strongly; for he feared no one, and cared very little for the temper of any woman, except his own Mrs. Aggett. He expected to be shown to the door, with much despatch. But instead of that, his hostess bore meekly with him, and even seemed to listen

with attention. For she knew in her heart, that she had gone a little too far, peradventure, and she respected the Established Church, whenever she was not furious. In her youth, she had been a quiet, gentle-looking person, with large blue eyes, and a plump round face, and delicate complexion. But, even then, the doubling of the chin, the bold cut of nostril, and fulness of the eyelid, showed that passion might come out, and patience not strike root in age.

"Is your homily over?" she inquired with a smile, which saved her words from rudeness; for like many other quick-tempered persons, she had a gentle smile, to put her in the right. "You are famous for very short sermons, with a very great deal in them. How I wish you were our vicar here, instead of Mr. Barker! He always goes on, for three quarters of an hour."

"Barker is a very sound and excellent divine. Many of my people long for him. I always get him over, for collection Sundays. He draws half-a-crown, where I draw a shilling. My farmers say, 'short time makes short wages.' But, what have you sent for me to do, about your fair deserter?"

"To advise me, Mr. Short; because you are so clever. People are so liable to misunderstand me. They never make allowance for the trials I encounter. Sir Joseph is all the week long at his office; and I have to go through every hardship by myself. Even if he were here, this moment, I could not allow him to interfere; because he is so one-sided. He looks upon Julia, as a perfect angel, because she understands his snuff so well. She gets on her father's blind side so cleverly, the crafty young time-server!"

"But your son, Lady Touchwood—your admirable son?"

"Dicky is a model of every known virtue; but he spends all his time, with the rat-catcher's dogs. At this time of year, it is most important to get the rats thinned off, you know. And, besides that, he takes such extraordinary views, that he goes against me very often. I have felt it my duty, to have this matter kept from him, for fear of his taking it, in an unbecoming manner."

"Which means, in plain English, that he would side with his sister. It was very good of her, to go away, without involving him. But something must be done, and done at once, if possible. You have not allowed the servants to discover, I suppose, the cause of this sudden departure."

"Their opinions are nothing whatever to me. If they form nasty ones, I discharge them. But Julia has much more dignity, I should hope, than to whine, about what she has brought upon herself. She could not help feeling, that she brought it on herself."

"Very well, then," replied Mr. Short, to avoid that difficult subject, "we may treat the matter, as a simple visit of the young lady to her dear godfather. The servants, and the stable-men, may be wroth, at being dispensed with, or endeavour to be so; but upon the whole, the less they have to do, the more thoroughly they enjoy it. You, on the other hand, show no anxiety, but leave the fair fugitive to her own devices. She, in her exile, begins to pine for her birds, and her books, her flowers, her piano, and her pet dog, Elfie."

"No, not Elfie. She has taken that wretch with her. You may trust her, never to stir a yard, without darling Elfie. She may pine, as you say, if she is capable of it; but surely, the first thing she should pine for, is her own good mother."

"So she will, and very painfully indeed. And the end of it is, that she writes a touching letter, and comes home, with a wholesome knowledge, that the ears must expiate the tongue's offences."

"You know nothing at all about her," Lady Touchwood answered, with a mother's smile. "What does a bachelor know of women? They calculate on them, from their own reason. For instance, do you think, that I could wait a month, with my daughter in the hands of other people, and learning all sorts of tricks, against her own mother? I can be very patient, and most long-suffering, when I am convinced that my trials require it. But as for sitting down like this, and thinking, and hoping for people to be reasonable, your own sense must show you, that I never, never could put up with it. Surely you must have some wiser plan than that!"

"I will tell you then, what I will do, if you think fit. I will call upon my old friend, Colonel Westcombe, if you wish me to do so, and see Miss Touchwood."

"Not as if you came from me, of course. Julia would get the upper hand directly. But why not go to-day, Mr. Short? The days are getting nice and long, and it is not very far."

"Twelve good miles, as the crow flies," said her visitor, thinking to himself that she deserved some brisk anxiety; "and the crow would have many steep hills, to fly over. My horse took me forty miles yesterday, and more. And if I went now, it would look as if you were devoured with regret, and penitence; and that would be below your dignity. To-morrow, I have an engagement of importance. But, unless you send to stop me, I shall make a point of being there in good time, on Saturday morning. You will see her on Saturday by dinner time; it takes a little time, to get over such things."

"It ought to be sooner, but it must not be later. Remember that Sir Joseph will be home that evening; and if he should not have

done well, this week, he might make a whole string of troublesome inquiries. You must not think me selfish. That is the last thing to be said of me. But I like people to be considerate to me, and amiable, and sweet-tempered. And I have a good right to expect it, Mr. Short, for I am always so to others—when they let me."

"Ah, yes, I see. But how fond you are of self-examination, Lady Touchwood! Is it because you find the result so favourable?"

"I am never put out, by sarcastic speeches; because I don't understand them. I hope you will come, and dine with us on Sunday, if that dreadful Mrs. Aggett will allow you."

The vicar was never ashamed to say that he heartily loved a good dinner. How many a parson has got his living, by knowing what good living is! Wherefore are college kitchens far more glorious than the lecture-rooms, and why does the buttery excel the chapel? Therefore Mr. Short said yes, with a very cheerful countenance; and observed with tender resignation, as he rode home through the park, that the fattest of the bucks was absent.

CHAPTER VII.

HOUSE-BREAKING.

As with many species of monœcious plants, so with some families of human kind, the female flower transcends the male, in beauty, size, and dignity. In all these points, Sir Joseph Touchwood, and Richard, his only son, fell far below the mark of the ladies they belonged to. The father, and founder, was an admirable man, when regarded from a national, that is to say, from a business point of view. He had never been known, except by himself, to miss a chance of getting on; and from day to day, he became more honest, as his character increased. Plymouth began to respect him deeply, as she found his vigour enlarge her trade, and some Radical deputations begged him to go up to Parliament. However, he had too much sense for that; and managed to get out of it, without offence to any one. But several of his school-fellows, who had not got on so well, thoroughly agreed with one another, that "Sandy Joe" (as they still called him) was making a fool of himself, in building, over there by Dartmoor, that popinjay, pack-of-cards, peep-show thing, like the Lord Mayor's coach in London; and, unless they were very much mistaken, such a stuck-up lot would

come down headlong. Sir Joseph, as soon as he heard of these sentiments, proved the largeness of his mind, by inviting all the critics to his great house-warming; and the few of them who went were so well treated, that they put down all the rest, who had no coats to go in.

A man who succeeds, with the hardest thing of all, and the highest in his opinion, that is to say, the money, is apt to believe that he can have his own way—if he chooses to assert it—in the lesser matters of life, such as family love, and respect, and the character of his children. The great contractor, perceiving that his son had no special turn for business, resolved to give him a fine education, and harness him afterwards, if needful. He sent him to a private school, and thence to Cambridge, and was proud to hear him called "the Cantab." The youth learned little, but was not dissatisfied, either with himself, or the world around him. For everybody looked upon him as a pleasant fellow, free-handed, careless, and good-natured in his way, talkative, full of small adventures of his own, and not disagreeably truthful. He was never long without some mighty hero, whom he worshipped, for strength, or ability, or knowledge of the world; and who could have done better whatever was done well, and with less than a quarter of the trouble. Though indolent enough of mind, he was very restless bodily, and would keep the whole house upon the fidget, unless he got his daily exercise. And now, as he was missing his term at Cambridge, and no field-sports were toward, his mother considered it a special grace of Providence, in favour of her Dicky, that Dartmoor was invaded by a mighty host of rats. For, if there was anything that Dicky Touchwood thoroughly enjoyed, it was a good rat-hunt.

Now the fact that every one, high or low, who possessed the pleasure of his acquaintance—and one need not be very high to do that—called him without hesitation, "Dicky Touchwood," is as clear a proof as can be given, of his easy, careless style. His mother, and sister, had bravely striven, at the date of his breeching, and then of his horsing, and then of his having a tail thrown over, to redeem him from a Dicky, into Richard, Dick, or Richie, or even the old-fared Dickon. At each of these epochs, their struggle was vain; but they rallied for a final stand, upon the breastwork of his matriculation. For many a mile, and league around them, none, but some half score of parsons, knew the meaning of that mighty word, and possibly it might have triumphed over nature, if the latter had not ignobly adopted the *argumentum ad hominem.* For the Cantab, upon his return, as arranged by his mother, in full

academical plight, as he leaped from the chariot of the Park, in the presence of the whole population, upset the entire effect, by shouting —"Three cheers, for Dicky Touchwood!"

His only sister, Julia, was of a very different order. Tall, and handsome, and resolute, and straight-forward, she kept her own place, and followed her own liking. She reigned over her father, when he was at home, and was fairly reducing her mother to subjection, in spite of some violent outbreaks. The latest of these had filled her with amazement, even more than with indignation; until she perceived, being very clear-sighted, that it was a last despairing effort, to cast off the tightening yoke. With skilful management on her part, it would prove the final clenching of the link. Dicky was a far more uncertain subject, for there was not substance enough in him to bind.

The sportive Dicky made few inquiries, as to the reason of his sister's absence. When she was gone, he could have his own way, without let, or hindrance, until something disagreed with his mother. For he was her darling, her pet, and her idol, and he alone of mortals might ever contradict her. So now, he resolved to make the most of this fine opportunity, and be master, so far as he cared to be, which was chiefly in matters of sport, and of feeding. Ordering the household right and left, that very afternoon he sent for three rat-catchers, and commanded them to sink their feuds, till Sunday, and be ready for him at the Park-gate, the next morning, with every dog, and ferret, they could hear of, together with their shovels, wire-cages, knobsticks, and all the other items of their interesting gear. With the prospect of a guinea, and the certainty of beer, they were punctual as the sun, at ten o'clock; and a motley host of bipeds, quadrupeds, and tripods—for some of the dogs had only three feet left—set forth gallantly, to invade the rats of Dartmoor.

Meanwhile, on this same Friday morning, Mr. Arthur (generally known as "Captain Larks") was busy with a lot of little vines in pots, which were crying out for more room, and more nurture. He had brought them, from his span-roof forcing-house, to a little glazed building of his own construction, snugly ensconced beneath the cliff. And here, with half a hundred of his new patent pots, he was craftily preparing a delicious compost, of mealy sod, mellow manure, and spicy bone-dust, enough to make the little mouths of dainty creatures water. At this he worked hard, without sparing his hands, pulling asunder the fibrous clods, but not reducing them to siftage, nipping in twain every wireworm, and grub, carefully

distributing the sweet-stuff from the linhay, and the benefit of happy bones, that should never ache again, then lightly, with his open fingers, carding up the mixture; until the whole was sleek, and fragrant, with the vital gifts of earth.

None but a very gruff fellow, unworthy to love, or be loved by, nature, can minister thus to his little dependants, without ministering also to his own cares. Captain Larks was down-hearted, and perplexed, and quavery, when he drew his hand to do this work; but courage came to him, and the love of life, and the golden touch of hope, as he went on. The interest in other things beyond himself grew bright and gladsome, as he worked for good; and without thinking of it, he began to whistle the old English tune, "We won't give up." Last night he had said to himself, "I must give up. Fate is too much for me, and all things go against me. I must fly from this refuge of many quiet years, and of pet things, the fruit of my own work. I must fly somewhere else, and begin once more, with the loss of all the little relics of my money, and rheumatism settling in my left shoulder-blade. And, worst of all, with darling Rose astray, and quite bewildered."

But now, he was hoping for the best, and well believing that fear had made too much of his imaginary trouble. The day was fine, and the sunshine brisk, enlivening mankind, and especially those, who live among the offspring of the sun. The soft spring air, afloat with sunbeams, brought the blue distance of the heavens to the earth; and the white blossoms shone upon it, as if they saw it. The gardener, as he plied his work, was breathing sweet contentment, for his heart drank in the beauty; and, better still, at every breath, he felt that fruit was setting.

"Father, how glad I am, to see you look like your old self again!" cried Rose, coming in from the grass-walk. "Mr. Short is wonderfully good and kind; but I should simply hate him, if he were to begin to disturb your mind. You never ate as much as my thumb for supper; and you couldn't look worse, if I ran away from you."

"I scarcely know, how much your thumb eats for supper," her father replied, as his pleasure increased, with gazing at her bright, and affectionate face; "but, if it has not over-eaten itself, I would beg some help from it with the ball of this vine."

"Now, if you don't know, papa, you ought to know," she said in a low voice, as they worked together; "and you ought to be punished, for not knowing well, that I am come to years of full discretion."

"It is a fine thing, to have a good opinion of oneself. There, you have proved your words, by snapping this root-fibre!"

Although he spoke thus, he was thinking to himself—"this daughter of mine is discreet, beyond her years. How she would enjoy her youth, if it were the same as other girls have! And how beautiful she is, the pretty darling!"

As for that, he was right beyond all doubt; though a father's pride goes astray sometimes, from cleaving, over-fondly, to the grooves of love. A very sweet face has its sweetness trebled, when tender doubt, and a light shade of anxiety, soften the bloom of the cheeks, and deepen the lustre of inquiring eyes. Rose Arthur (with the sun-gleam on her hair, and the pure white forehead touched with thought, and the delicate oval of the face enhanced by the suppliant curve of neck) was not only charming to look at, but also bewitching to think of afterwards.

"How can I have at all a good opinion of myself," she asked her father, with some twinkle of a tear, "when nobody considers me of any use at all?"

"What a bare-faced bit of fishing for a compliment! Can I ever do anything, without you now? And when have I failed to praise you, up to your deserts?"

"I don't mean such trumpery things as potting—or at least they are not at all trumpery, I know—but what I mean is great things, about people's lives, and reasons for doing things, and not telling other people."

"My darling," said her father, without displeasure, for he saw that she was trembling at her own audacity, "I will not pretend to misunderstand you; neither have I any right to blame you. You want to know, why I live a different life from other people, whom you know; why I am so reserved, and lonely, and keep you shut up in this dull place."

"Father, I never had such an idea. The place is quite good enough for me, I should hope, if it is good enough for you. And, as for being lonely, what more can I want, than to have you, and help you, and try to be half as good to you, as you are to me?"

"Well, my little Rosy one, that is all very fine in theory. The practice, however, goes otherwise; or why are you asking questions now?"

"I never would have said a word, dear father, except that I cannot bear to see you vexed. It does not matter about myself; but when it comes to you, it is dreadful."

"But suppose, my pet, that it is only for you, that I care much about anything. Suppose that, for reasons which are not my own to tell, I am bound to keep my darling child from the roughness of

the world; and can do it only, by keeping outside of the world, altogether. If that were so, you would have faith enough, to believe that I acted for the best, and love enough not to increase my cares, by questions which I cannot answer."

"Oh, father, I wish that I had bitten out my tongue, before I asked a single question. I will never be so cruel, and undutiful, again. But you will forgive me, for this once?"

"Rosy, I am very glad you did ask. It will make things happier between us, on the whole. You must have thought, a thousand times, that there was something odd about us. It is better to make up your mind to that, than to live in a doubtful suspicion of it. In the course of time, you will know the whole. But I fear that it will not be, while I live."

"Then I hope that it will never be, in this world, father. Whatever should I do without you? It is too dreadful!"

"There now, my darling, let us talk no more about it," said the father, with his child's tears on his cheeks; "we have got a lot of work to do; and let us give our minds to it. After all, there are millions of people in the world, not a thousandth part so happy as you, and I, may be, while we have one another's love to help us."

"I should like to see anybody impudent enough, to be happier than I am, all day long. I have never known an atom of unhappiness, in my life."

She gave a little sob, to prove her words, and caught her breath quickly, at such a mistake. Then she tossed up a heavy pot, and turned her sleeves up, to show what energetic arms she had.

"How they have grown in the night! Look at this!" she exclaimed, with a smile, that was full of delight. "Father, there is nothing, in all the world, more lovely than a baby vine, just when it begins to understand things, and offer its innocent hands to us. Look, for one moment, at this little darling; now, doesn't it seem to be toddling to me, with its tiny hands spread out? Papa, I am sure, there is nothing in the world half so beautiful as gardener's work. What are jewellers, or watchmakers, or ivory-carvers, or even painters, to compare with a genuine gardener? The things that they handle are dead, and artificial, and cannot know the meaning of the treatment they receive. But our work is living, and natural, and knows us, and adapts itself to follow our desires, and please us; and has its own tempers, and moods, and feelings, exactly the same as we have. For people to talk about 'sensitive plants' does seem to be such sad nonsense, when every plant that lives is sensitive. You are very busy; but just spare time, to look

at this holly-leafed baby vine, with every tiny point cut like a prickle, yet much too tender and good to prick me. It follows every motion of my hand ; it crisps its little veinings up, whenever I come near it ; and it feels, in every fibre, that I am looking at it."

"It is in my power to swallow tales of gigantic bulk," Mr. Arthur replied, and then opened his mouth, to show its noble capacity; "especially, when they come from you, my dear. Nevertheless, after watching my vines for many years, I have never had the luck to receive such reciprocity. Please to show me, the next time you see them looking at you."

"As if I would be guilty of such treachery, papa! They know that I am foolish, and they like me for it. But you are much too wise for them, and scare them of their confidence. Stop a moment ; did you hear that noise again? There has been such a noise, going on around the beacon. The glass has prevented you from hearing it, I suppose. I meant to have told you, till we spoke of something else. There seems to be a quantity of men, and dogs, up there, shouting, and barking, and screaming out, and making the greatest uproar."

"Whatever it is, I would strongly recommend them, to keep it outside of my premises. Halloa!"

Well indeed might he thus exclaim. A dark bulk fell upon the glittering roof ; at the crash, a shower of flashing splinters flew, like a bursting firework, and a human form tumbled in, all doubled up, and rolled upon a newly-potted platoon of those sensitive vinelets.

"Oh, he must be killed!" cried Rose, running up to him. "The poor unfortunate little boy! I have got his head up on a pot. Father, hold him up, till I get the water."

Rose herself was bleeding sadly, from the arrowy sleet of glass ; but without two thoughts, she was off, and came back, with a long-spouted can, and put a copper spreader on it.

"No," said her father, as she held up the can, to water this gentleman freely ; "not a drop of water. I have seen much blood-shed. Water would be wrong, in a case like this. Leave him to me. Run for bandages quickly ; and send Moggy off, the short way to the village, quick foot, for Dr. Perperaps."

Rose was off, like a deer ; and the gardener began, after drawing out one or two splinters of glass, and placing the youth in a better position, to close the worst cuts, with cotton wool (which he always kept in the greenhouse), tightly bound with broad strips of bast. Then he soaked the wool with cold water ; and the patient gave a long gasp, and began to look about him.

"Not dead yet, my boys!" He tried to shout, but only muttered; "At him again, Tiger, at him again! Get him by the scruff, Bob; don't be an idiot. Hurrah, well done, Peppercorns!"

"Hold your tongue, sir, and shut your eyes," Mr. Arthur broke in, with his deepest tone; and the youth stared at him, and obeyed the order, after putting up his lips, as if he longed to whistle. And while his mind went wandering, into wonder, and distant dimness, a little dog, with all his wits about him, came in at the door; and, making obeisance with a tremulous tail, asked courteous leave to sniff at him. Mr. Arthur, being fond of dogs, said, "Yes;" and before this dog could have satisfied his mind, two more came in, to help him. But the first dog, being of a kingly order, signified to them that they were not wanted; and when they retired at his growl, he joined them, and the three held council. As sagely as any three M.D.'s they conducted their consultation, with their ears upon the curl, and their tails upon the wag, so far as men had spared them. But suddenly all three stumps fell flat, and quivered with humility; for, lo! there stood their worshipful masters, puffing, and blowing, and inclined to swear, at having only two legs each, to bring them down the wall of crag.

"Cappen Larks, be 'un killed?" they cried, all scared to go into the greenhouse. "The young Squire Dicky, oh lor, oh lor; and all the vault to be laid on us! Back there with 'e, every one o' you chaps! Us 'll lash the legs of any chaps, as trieth it. These be Cappen's own privy grounds, and no blackguards admitted in."

"Be off every one of you," the owner shouted, with a smile, which went against his words; "or in two minutes, you will be prosecuted, with the utmost rigour of the law."

"Cappen Larks, don't ye be so haish, for to deny us a zaight o' the poor Master Dicky. There never wor a better one, to work a rat out; and if a' be killed, us'll niver hunt again."

"My good fellows, he is not killed, and he won't be, if you will get out of the way. But I won't answer for it, if you come plaguing here. Be off, if you care for his life, this moment."

"Cappen, us 'll get out of the wai, quick-sticks. It goo'th to our hearts, to zee 'un blading so. But, to vare up they stones again, is beyond our breeches."

"Fare out this way, then; across the water. But tell me first how the young man fell, and what his name is, and where he lives."

"'Twor all by rason of the bottled beer, sir. Do'e see thiccy moot-stoon, round the cornder? Us had a score of bottled beer, up yonner; and young Squire Dicky's hat were too small to hold

'un. Squire Dicky Touchwood, to Touchwood Park. Whatever will my lady zay to us?"

"You had better, go and see; but tell her not to be uneasy. The doctor will be here at once; and the lad will soon come round. Clear out, this very instant, dogs and men."

For, by this time, thirty dogs, of every genealogy, were poking about, among the captain's pots.

CHAPTER VIII.

COLONEL WESTCOMBE.

WHILE the sportive Cantab thus broke into Mr. Arthur's humble greenhouse, his sister Julia was enjoying the keen air of the western moors, and passing through it swiftly, and sweetly, with the cheerful aid of a well-bred horse. Miss Touchwood always looked well in the saddle; and a lady's riding-habit was a graceful dress at that time, although the hat was hideous. But this young lady, thinking for herself, would not wear the hideous hat; but designed, in lieu thereof, a sensible and becoming head-gear, and got it made at Devonport. With its curving rim turned up at one side, and a grey feather pluming round the front, without any monstrous buckle, it sat lightly over her long, dark eyebrows, clear eyes, and expressive face.

"What a booty her be!" said a tramp, to whom she had thrown a shilling, graciously.

"So her maight be," his wife replied, "so long as her getteth her own way."

Riding with her, across the moor, was her host, and godfather, Colonel Westcombe, a plain, stout man, of average stature, thick-set, broad across the back, and looking as if no tailor's art could make his clothes sit well to him. But that consideration moved him not, so long as he had plenty of room inside them. He thought of appearances, no more than "Captain Larks" himself did; though he liked to see ladies nicely dressed, and young men looking tidy. Upon his face, his character was as clearly outlined as his nose—a distinct, and eloquent feature. Any one could see, that he was simple-minded, slow at working out the twists of thought, accustomed to let his ideas flow into the mould of words, before dealing with them, gently reluctant to think evil of mankind, con-

cerning any matter, in which he had not as yet been robbed atrociously, compassionate, fearless, and as hopeful as a child, and properly indignant when he came across a rogue. But large as the field was for that right feeling, (even in those more upright days), the Colonel was larger than to stay there very long ; for his knowledge of the world must not harden him so much.

After many years of scrimped penurious life, such as behoves the British officer (especially when he has done great things, and must pay for the honour of doing them), this Colonel suddenly came into possession of large property. Diggory Westcombe, his father's elder brother, (who never would have anything to do with them in life, through some bitterness of blood), forgave upon his death-bed all the injuries he had done, and left all his property, when quite despaired of, to his next of kin, and right heir, Colonel John Westcombe.

That well-known warrior, and strong sharp-shooter against the sap-work of poverty, was amazed at being taken in the rear like this, and surrounded with an army bearing gifts. For a month of market-days, he was out of sorts, at not having to do his own marketing ; for his clear sense told him, that what used to be economy, would now be no better than meanness. For the sake of his wife, whose health was weak, and of his son, who had the world before him, he was bound to rejoice at this access of wealth ; but for himself, as he was laid upon the shelf, he would rather have rested upon an oaken, than a golden one.

" If you please, Uncle John," said his fair god-daughter, who had leave to call him so, though she was only of church-kin to him ; " I cannot allow you to stay in this silent mood, which is growing over you."

" My dear, I beg your pardon," he answered, with his simple courtesy, and pleasantness ; " I am sure, I would have talked, if I had anything to say. But surely with all this noble prospect—hills, and valleys, and watercourses, and the gorse coming out, and the sheep, and the ponies—you would much rather look about, than talk."

" Not for a moment; I am used to all that. It comes, and goes, just the same, and tells me nothing. I would rather have one of your stories of the war, than all the hills of Dartmoor, and the valleys full of water, and the sheep, that must terminate in tough mutton. And the beauty of your stories is that they must be true ; because you always tell them, in the very same words, and with the very same look, every time."

" What a prosaic companion you have got! They say that

Charles II. told his stories always so; but I hope that I resemble him, in few other points. Now, which of my stories do you wish me to begin?"

"The two, Uncle John; the famous pair, which you promise to tell, when you have had a good dinner. You must know the two I mean, as well as I do. The first is, about the bravest man you ever met with; and the second ought to be, about the noblest man. The one I have heard always makes me proud of being born in England. I would rather hear such, than see fifty miles of moorland, or even a waterfall fifty feet high; because they stir me into great ideas, without making me seem small. Oh, how can poor Dicky spend the best of his time in rat-hunting?"

"Different people look at things, from different points of view, my dear," said the colonel, who liked a rat-hunt himself, and also was fond of a waterfall, and a fine view from the saddle. For although he never noticed things, particularly much, he was pleased that they should pass by him nicely, without obliging him to think, any more than change of air might do. "As long as I can remember, Julia, I have been an admirer of fine landscapes; and, indeed, I saw very beautiful things, in Spain; yet I do not know enough about such matters, to deny that—that what you may call human affairs should have the preference. Certainly the bravest man I ever yet have met with——"

"Uncle John, if you dare to begin it like that, you will flounder before you have come to the snuff place; and if you were to hesitate, you would begin to shake my perfect faith in it."

"Julia, is it possible that you can entertain the mere shadow of a doubt, about the very least particular? If I could imagine, that you did that, you should never again—I mean that I should never take any further pleasure, in relating to you that, or any other fact again."

"Now, Uncle John, you really must not be so exceedingly savage, and peppery. You begin to remind me of—well, never mind."

"My dear," said the colonel, "I beg your pardon heartily, if I have hastily expressed myself. I am well aware, that I sometimes do so; since I came into what people will insist upon calling my improved position. But I never mean anything by it, my dear child; and I am always sorry afterwards."

"Then you have no right to be so, and ought to go on more. Your only fault is, that you are too fond of letting people triumph over you. But now be quick, that's a dear Uncle John, and make amends by beginning it aright. You know that it always begins,

like this,—'Towards the close of the hardest, perhaps, of the many hard conflicts our great commander'—but stop, till I come the right way of the wind."

"I am not at all sure," her companion answered, as the young lady drew her horse to the leeward side of his, and looked at him, with an encouraging smile; "that it is in my power to do justice to that remarkable little incident, while I am riding a fast-trotting horse. I was thoroughly used to a horse in my youth, for my father did afford to keep one, and I was on his back perpetually. And in the Peninsula, I have ridden some thousands of miles, with despatches. But, for five-and-twenty years, since I have not been wanted, our circumstances did not permit of much riding; and it takes a little time to be comfortable again."

"You ride like a Centaur, Uncle John. It is impossible for anybody to ride better. But still I can easily understand, that you like to do things in the regular way. Look, here are two great stones that seem to have dropped from the sky, on purpose to be sat upon. Suppose we jump off, and rest the horses; and you can enjoy all the landscape, while you talk."

By the side of the long and lonely track, these hoary granite blocks invited the traveller to a breezy rest. A tranquil mind would not have found that invitation marred, because accepted, through long ages now, by those who have the rest, without the breeze. The stones are the well-known "Coffin-stones;" whereat, for more than six hundred years, the bearers of the dead across the moor have halted from their heavy plod, laid down their burden on the stones, to take its latest stretch of mountain, and spread their own bodies on the grass around, to talk of what would happen to themselves ere long. Of these things the young lady had no knowledge, else would she never have sat down there; neither did her companion know; but the knowledge would not have moved him, more than to make him sit bare-headed.

"Let the poor things graze; the grass is sweet," he said, as he took the bridles off; and the nags, after jerking their noses with surprise, pricked their ears forward—not enough for him to catch them—and looked at him with well meaning doubt. "Yes, you go, and crop, I say. The Lord has given you good teeth. And be sure you come at once, when you hear me whistle."

Obedient to his voice, they went, with a little tenderness of step at first, because it was long since they had crushed the blade; but presently the joy of nature's colour, and the taste, broke forth in them; they pranced, and threw up their heels, and capered; and

the gentleman's horse made his stirrups clash beneath him; then fearing to waste one precious moment, they fell to, and worked the best mowing machine that has ever been invented. The colonel, more happy than a king, smiled at them, rested on his elbow, and began his tale.

"Towards the close of the hardest, perhaps, of the many hard conflicts our great commander won, by the aid of a gracious Providence, and his own unwearied vigilance; although the position of the enemy was turned, and the issue of the day scarcely doubtful, one very important post held out, and had repulsed all our attempts to carry it. The difficulties of the ground were great; not only was the approach very steep, and intersected by a water-course, but also the French artillery, beautifully served, at grapeshot range, poured a crossing fire upon our attack. At the same time, our own guns could not be brought to bear, with any good effect, upon this crest, which was defended with admirable spirit by a body of seasoned veterans, as calm, and steady, as our very best brigade. In short, there seemed no chance of carrying the position, without fearful sacrifice; or even with it.

"The line of the enemy, as I have said, was being driven in, at almost every other point; and our great commander, perceiving that we must eventually obtain this post, sent orders that, as we could not take it, we should maintain our position, until the post was taken for us.

"Gentlemen,—or rather I should say, 'my dear,'—it is impossible for me to make you understand, what the feeling of our division was, when we received that message."

"Yes, Uncle John, I can understand it thoroughly. I should have been ready to knock my head, against the first French cannon I could find. But here you always take a pinch of snuff, with permission of the ladies, if any are present. You have my permission, and more than that, my orders. You will never take that post, without it."

"I know how incapable I am," resumed the colonel, in a loftier tone, "of describing the condition of the human mind; but all around me being Englishmen—or, at least, an English lady—I need only say, that we were vexed. Because we had always supposed ourselves—whether rightly, or wrongly, is not for me to say—to be the flower of the whole British army. Every man of us was burning to be at it, once again; and yet we knew better than to set at nought our orders, by attempting another direct assault. I remember, as if I were looking at him now, how the indomitable

General H—— turned from the staff-officer, and spat upon the ground, to save himself from swearing at our great commander. But while we were all of us as red as a rocket, a young fellow, who had lately joined our division, a lieutenant in the 'Never mind what Hussars,' as we called them from their recklessness, came sheepishly up to our General H——, and asked for a private word with him. The general knew something of his family, I believe; and that makes no small difference, even with the strictest discipline. So, in spite of his temper, which was very bad just then, he led the young man apart; and presently came back, with his usual smile recovered, while the young man remounted his horse, and rode away.

"To us, it had been a most irksome thing, to wait there, doing nothing, but hearing in the distance the laughter of the enemy, and receiving, now and then, a round shot; and when there was a call for some forty volunteers, who could handle an axe, and haul trees away, the only trouble was to choose the men. Having been lucky enough to do something, which pleased the general, that morning, and being rather supple-jointed in those days, I obtained the command of this little detachment, under very simple orders. Our duty was nothing more than to draw three corks, as the general said, with a laugh at his own wit; and I never draw a cork now, or get it done for me—since I lost the right of doing my own work—without thinking, what a hard job it was, on that occasion.

"It seems, that the young man, I told you of just now, was very fond of wandering among the woods alone, whenever he could get the opportunity, without actual breach of orders; and he had just recognised the spur of the hill, which the enemy held so stubbornly, as a spot well known to him from a former visit. And unless his memory deceived him altogether, a narrow neck of land would be found, running down slantwise from the hill on our right, into the very heart of the position. With a hundred, or a hundred and fifty horse, dashing down upon the guns, while engaged in front, the whole must fall into our hands at once. Only there was no possibility of a charge, while three young cork-trees, which stood upon the neck, at its narrowest point, were standing.

"Now the difficulty was, as you will see at once, if you honour me by following my story, gentlemen, not only to cut down those three trees, but to get them clean out of the way, ere ever the enemy should have time to learn what was intended, and bring their guns to bear in that direction. In such a case, cavalry crowded together would simply be blown away, like wads; so that we were forced to

go to work very warily, taking advantage of the sham attack in front.

"The trees were quite young, and the softness of the bark dulled the sound of our axes, as well as their edge; and being partly sheltered from the outlook of the enemy, by the form of the ground, we were getting on quite nicely, and had cleared away two of the trees, and felled the third, and were rolling it out of the way, before giving the signal for the charge, when the whistle of grape-shot told us that we had been discovered. One man fell, and we lifted him aside, that the horses might not tread on him; and then at any risk, I gave the signal; because it must be now, or never. Our volunteers were ordered to slip off, right and left, as two other guns were brought to bear on us; but my duty compelled me, very much against my liking, to stop in the middle of the drift, to show our cavalry where the obstruction was. For the smoke was hanging low upon the ground, just like a fog.

"Now while I stood there, without any consideration, and spread out like a finger-post—for I had not the courage to be careful—the enemy sent another volley up the drift, and much of it fell to my share. So that if they had measured their powder aright, I had never lived to find fault with it. Down I went, just in the stream of the track, and for three months heard no more of it.

"But the men at the side, who were out of the way, gave a very clear history of what happened, when the shower of grape went past them. The charge, which must have trampled me to death, was stopped by the young officer commanding, with a wave of his sword, and his horse reined across; and then he leaped off, and came alone to where I lay. In the thickest of the fire, he lifted me, they said, as calmly as a nurse takes a baby from the cradle, and placed me behind the cork-tree, where shot could never touch me, and the hoof must turn aside. Then he tore off the scarf from his neck, and bound up a wound, that was draining my body; while the Frenchmen perceived him, as the smoke rolled off, and like truly noble fellows, forebore their fire. He kissed his hand to them, in acknowledgment of this; and then shouting to them that the fighting was resumed, returned to his horse, gave the signal to charge, and carried their guns in a twinkling. Now, such a deed as that makes one proud to be an Englishman."

"Or even a good Frenchman," fair Julia replied. "I scarcely know, which side behaved the best. And though you make so little of your own part, I think you were the hero of the whole thing, Uncle John. But of course you found out the young officer's name?

And now for the other story, Uncle John. I have heard this story of the bravest man, a lot of times; and I like it better almost every time. But I have never heard the story of the noblest man; and I dare say that is finer still."

"It is," the colonel answered, in his simple way. "But I never like to tell that tale, in cold blood, or before my dinner. And even so, I must have people, who can enter into it. And even then, one ought to have a heavy cold, to explain the condition of the eyes that comes of it."

"The heavy cold you will certainly have; if you sit on these cold stones so long. And here comes a hailstorm, the delicate attention of soft April to Dartmoor. Oh, I shall be blind, if it goes on like this. Whistle for the horses, uncle dear."

CHAPTER IX.

THE RED-FACED MAN.

BEFORE "the ever loyal city," as Exeter loves to call itself, was undermined with iron bars, beneath its castle-ramparts, Northernhay was a quiet place, aside of the noisy London road, and pleasant for a Sunday walk. Here, in a good old ivied house, snugly encompassed by thick cob walls, was living, and well deserved to live, a gentleman of the ancient name of "Tucker." Also his Christian name was ancient; being "Caleb," and no more.

This gentleman lived with his widowed sister, Mrs. Giblets, late of Barnstaple, whose two boys went to the high grammar-school, as often as they could not help it. The deceased Mr. Giblets, a currier of repute, had thrice been Mayor of Barnstaple, and had sacrificed his life to his festive duties, at the time of the Reform Bill. His relict was a lady of like dignity and virtue, convinced (as all Barum people are) of the vast superiority of that town; yet affable to the Mayor of Exeter. Their daughter, Mary Giblets, was a very nice young lady, a thorough girl of Devon, with a round rosy face, a smile for everybody, and almost at everything, a pair of brisk, substantial feet, and a special turn for marketing.

Caleb Tucker, the owner of the house, but not the master always, had long been in business, as a timber-merchant, and still would make a purchase, or a sale, upon occasion, although he had retired from the firm, which he had reared. Honesty, industry, enterprise,

and prudence, had won for him nearly quite enough of money, to live upon happily, and want no more. In the vigour of life, when the hearts of men are as quick of warmth, as a fire at its prime, he had incurred a very serious loss, never to be balanced in £ *s. d.* The wife of his love, and the little ones of theirs, went all to the grave, between a Sunday and a Saturday, through a storm of fever, called in Devonshire "the plague." This sorrow took the zeal out of his existence, and left him a grave, well-balanced man, who had learned that the poise of life is not troy-weight.

Now, in the holiday of calm age, Caleb Tucker was a venerable person; slow to move, except with pity; and tranquil in the steadfast hope of finding, in a larger world, the losses of this little one. His sister was twenty years younger than himself, and her children were his successors; and he meant to do his duty to his own kin, instead of founding charities, to be jobbed by radicals. Under these circumstances, it was right of Mrs. Giblets, to make much of him, and encourage him to save, and grow, his cash.

"How sudden the changes of the weather seem to be!" he was saying to his sister, as they sat out in the garden, on the Saturday, the very day after the colonel's tale had been hurried by the hail-storm; "the spring weather never used to change like this; at least when the turn of the days was over. How bright it was yesterday, until it began to rain! Then the hills, towards Dartmoor, were covered with snow, or hail, or whatever it may have been."

"It must have been either hail, or snow, if it was white," Mrs. Giblets replied, being proud of perfect accuracy; "the weather is continually changing; but the only white things in it are snow, and hail."

"Certainly, Mollikins, and frost as well. It might have been the white frost on the moors. But whatever it was, it made me think, this morning, as I looked at it from my bedroom window, of that poor gentleman I bought the land for. He has made such a beautiful garden up there, and I fear that the frost will destroy all his bloom."

"He must suffer the will of the Lord, I suppose; as everybody else is obliged to do. Sometimes I lose my patience with him; because you never tell me, who he is. Why should a gentleman come down here, and buy a little far-off place like that, and work like a common labourer? No one would dare to attempt such a thing, in the neighbourhood of Barnstaple. It would be the duty of the mayor, to find him out. But in this part of the world, conspirators carry on, just as they please."

"Sister, you talk a great deal too fast. If you ever know the truth, you will be sorry for your words. Women are so fond of rushing to the worst conclusions."

"Some of them do so; but whose fault is it? You know that I do the very opposite, Caleb, whenever I am not denied the knowledge. I wish, with all my heart, that I had never heard about him; although I liked him very much, the only time I saw him. But I always take things, as I find them. I have no curiosity whatever, about anything."

"Molly, you are very wise," answered Mr. Tucker; "we have all of us enough of trouble, with our own affairs. And here comes pretty Mary, for to tell us something pleasant."

"No, indeed, uncle, it is quite the other way," cried Mary, as she hurried up the walk, from the side-door; "I took the short cut, and I left all the nuts I was buying for Bob, and for Harry, to tell you not to see the man—or the gentleman at least, who is riding up the hill, to look for you. Oh, uncle, dear, he is such a nasty man; and has the evil eye, if ever anybody had it! Oh dear, I turned my Testament in my pocket—mischief will come of it, as sure as I'm alive."

"If ever there was a little goose, in the King's, or rather, in the Queen's dominions now, her name is Mary Giblets." Though he spoke thus bravely, Mr. Tucker did not like it; and his sister said—

"Mary, fie for shame! Look at your gathers, Miss!"

"I had no time to think about anything at all," she answered, with her colour ripened, from the peach-bloom into peach; "he was asking at Besley's, and Snell's, and Sharland's, where Mr. Caleb Tucker lived; and he called you 'the land-agent.' Mr. Snell told him, you had never been that, but a strictly retired gentleman; and then the man laughed—such a nasty laugh, mamma; and young Tom Besley, who is always such a stupid, looked up from the copper mill, where he was grinding pepper, and he says, 'That young lady will show you, sir; that's his own niece, Miss Giblets.' I felt, as if I could have boxed his ears. And the red-faced man rode up to me, with his hat off, and said, 'Miss Giblets, will you be my charming guide?' And I couldn't think of anything to say; he looked so impudent. But I made him a curtsey, and began walking up the hill; and then I thought to myself, that I would pay him out. So I turned down Black Horse Alley, towards the cut across parson's meadow (which is the nearest way, you know), and left him to follow, or not, as he pleased. Well, it pleased him to come, and

to want to talk to me; just as if I were nothing but a shop girl. I looked at him, over my shoulder, now and then; and said yes and no, for a quarter of a mile; and likely, he considered me as stupid as Tom Besley. Then suddenly, we came upon the high turn-stile of parson's meadow, where the bull is; and I slipped through, like anything. 'Halloa! Do you expect me to ride over this?' he said. And I said, 'Oh dear! Oh dear! How very stupid of me! But you only asked me for the shortest way, sir. I dare not stop, to give you any more directions, because of the bull, in the bottom of the ham.' And away I ran, and here I am."

"My darling, what a risk to run! I have told you not to do it," her mother exclaimed, as she finished her tale; "that bull has tossed three people."

"I am ten times more afraid of a bad man, than a bull. Now be sure that you refuse to see him, Uncle Caleb."

"My dear," said Mr. Tucker, "you are scarcely old enough, to be reproached with want of reason. I dare say, the gentleman has no harm in him; although he may be a little forward. If so, he found his match in a very modest girl; though one of strong prejudices, I am afraid. Let us go into the house; perhaps he will be here directly."

Before they had time to put their garden-chairs away, the rusty wire, beneath the thatch of the warm cob-wall, that sheltered them, gave a slow, reluctant, creaking jerk, and then a quick rattle, as it was pulled again; and the big bell, swinging in the ivy of the house-porch, threw up its mouth, like a cow about to bellow, and fell back upon its wagging tongue, through a rustle of crisp leafage. "Let him ring again," said Mr. Tucker; "when a man is in a hurry, I have known it do him good. Don't go away, sister; I will see him here. I am too old a soldier, to be carried by storm, in this way. Mary, you be off, my dear; as if the bull was after you."

Miss Giblets withdrew, but much against her will, for she had a fine stock of healthy curiosity, and had made up her mind, that the red-faced man was come upon an interesting errand. Then Bill, the boy of all work, came grinning, with a card in one hand, and a shilling in the other. "A' gied me this," he said, showing first the shilling, as the more important object of the two. "Be I to kape 'un, or gie 'un to you?"

"Gie 'un to your mother," replied his master, as he took the card, and read the words "Mr. George Gaston," with no address beneath them.

"Ha, sir, and how are you to-day?" The visitor shouted, with a hearty voice. "I have taken the liberty of following my pasteboard. I hope I see the lady quite well also. Madam, your servant! I am quite old-fashioned. I glory in the society of the ladies; but my manners are comparatively out of date, I fear."

The widow of the mayor possessed a shrewd tongue, as well as a stately reserve, sometimes; and the former was burning to say, that the sooner such manners were positively out of date, the better. Like her daughter, the lady conceived an extraordinary hatred of this man, at sight; but she only showed it, by a careful bow, and a gaze of reasonable surprise.

"Excuse me, sir—Mr. Gaston, I suppose," said Caleb Tucker, rising slowly, and lifting his hat from his silvery curls; "but I doubt not that, if you are come upon business, you have brought me a letter of introduction; I do very little in the way of business now, and only with people, who are known to me. And I have not the honour of remembering your name."

"You are quite right. Everything you do is right, according to the account I have received of you. Shall I take this chair? But it would make me wretched, to think that I had banished Mrs. Tucker."

"That lady is my sister, sir—Mrs. Giblets, formerly of Barnstaple."

"Bless my heart! I never heard of such a thing. Have I met Mrs. Giblets at last, without knowing her? My cousin, Sir Courtenay, is always speaking of her, and her graceful, and refined hospitality. But too exclusive—he told me as much. Like all the superior ladies, you are too exclusive, Mrs. Giblets."

"That charge has been brought against me, I confess," the lady replied with dignity; "but wherever would you be, sir, without you drew a line, between wholesale, and retail?"

Mrs. Giblets retired, with a gracious bow, but some doubt still about the good faith of the visitor; for although he was older than herself, as her conscience (which she always consulted on the subject) told her, he wore a red-striped neckerchief, and a cut-away coat, of bright green, with gilt buttons. Moreover, his voice was loud and harsh, his manner too bold, his figure burly, and his gestures impatient, and almost imperious; while his face, though resolute and rather handsome, expressed, more than impressed, good opinion of himself. His forehead was high and square, his eyes piercing but not steadfast, his nose strong and aquiline, and his chin very firm, and prominent. But the colour of the cheeks was

fiercely red, the mouth very wide and voracious; and instead of a curve at the hinges of the jaws, there occurred a conspicuous angle. Boys, who have powers of observation, happily extinguished in later life, dubbed him at school, "George Coffin-face;" but when his brow expanded, the name no longer suited him, except as regards the part below the ears, where a few white whiskers showed the harshness of the angle, now become more prominent, from years of zealous exercise; while his very florid colour, and thick crop of tawny hair, gave abundance of life to his countenance.

"No, Mr. Tucker, I have ridden a long way," he began, after looking round, and bringing his chair nearer, "upon a matter, really of no importance to me, in any other light than this—that I may do a kindness, and help a fellow-creature. Probably, I shall not even earn so much as thanks; and you know how little those are worth. I do not pretend to be moved by any Quixotic ardour, or Christian duty, or broad philanthropy, or any romantic motive. But a sense of gratitude for a good turn done me, five-and-twenty years ago, together with some natural desire to baffle selfish roguery—although it is no concern of mine, you see—has led me to sacrifice some valuable time, and trespass perhaps on yours, sir."

"Not at all. Don't speak of it. I am glad to be of service," Mr. Tucker replied, in his regular way. "But did I understand, that you had brought a letter to me?"

"Not a syllable of any kind. I make a point of never insulting anybody. And to suppose that a man, of your experience, could fail to know a gentleman at first sight, would be most impertinent. And let me remind you," continued Mr. Gaston, perceiving that the other looked a little glum at this, "that I am not come, upon any business question, where my solvency, and so on, might require to be established. My object is simply to perform a kindness; and your aid will cost you nothing, neither risk a single penny. I ask you no favour; I simply propose it, as a duty to yourself, that you should enable me to confer a benefit, upon a most deserving, and ill-treated fellow-Christian. Instead of losing anything by it, you will gain very largely. For you will thus restore to position, and some wealth, a man of most grateful, and generous nature. I have no cant about me, and it is my abhorrence; but it would be too much of the opposite extreme, to deny that the hand of a good Providence is here."

"Sir, you speak well, and very sensibly so far;" answered the cautious timber-merchant, trying to conquer his unreasonable dislike of the red-faced gentleman at first sight; "if you will kindly tell

me, what it is that I can do, I will do it; unless there should be reason to the contrary, or at any rate necessity for consideration."

"Oh, it does not require half a moment's consideration; you will say that I have made much ado about nothing. All I want to know, is the address of a gentleman, for whom you bought a small estate, from fifteen to twenty years ago; probably the shorter date is the more correct one—rather a tall man, with a military manner."

"I am not a land-agent," Mr. Tucker replied; "neither do I meddle with the lawyer's business. But at one time, from my knowledge of the county, and purchase of timber, and so on, I was frequently asked to obtain a purchaser for small outlying properties, perhaps belonging to the gentlemen, who were selling me their timber. Of course, the matter afterwards passed through the proper hands; and I never thought of making any charge for what I did. Still there were so many cases, that without particulars, I cannot pretend to say anything."

"But, you must have known, in almost every case, who the purchaser was, what made him buy, where he lived, what he did with himself, &c. Officers seldom turn farmers, I believe, and seldom have managed, from their miserable pay, to save money to buy land with."

"I am ready to oblige you, Mr. Gaston, if I can, without any breach of confidence. Your inquiry is unusual, as you must know; and unless you can manage to be more precise, I see no possibility of helping you. If you can supply me with the name, and date, I may have some recollection of the matter you refer to. Also it is only fair to ask, how you have heard of me, and my share in the business. You can scarcely consider that question rude."

"Certainly not, my dear sir," replied the visitor; "everything is plain, and above board here. I only regret, that from my own ignorance, I should have to give you so much trouble. But in your desire to do good, you will excuse me. The case has some little peculiarities; which, with your permission, I will recount. Only, let me ask you first, if you are sure that a long tale will not weary you."

"Nothing will weary me about—I mean in a case of so much interest."

"How good of you, to feel such interest without any knowledge of the people implicated! But alas, Mr. Tucker, I am suffering from thirst. I have ridden nearly fifty miles, since noon; now all very pure air, such as that of Devon, contains saline particles; and

in the distance, I behold a pump. I would crave your hospitable leave, to go, and move the handle."

"Mr. Gaston, I humbly beg your pardon," said the ancient gentleman, arising with a sigh; "but my mind is not as present to me, as it used to be. We have not the name of inhospitality, as a rule, in Devonshire; but I give you my honour, sir, that it quite escaped me. And after your ride—what will my sister say? I beg you to come into our little parlour. It is getting rather cold out here, and not so comfortable. Perhaps you have never even dined? Oh dear!"

"I shall go to the pump, and that alone, if you say another syllable, my dear sir. But if you make a point of it, I will go in. But, nothing to eat, sir—not one morsel. My dinner is a trifle to a man like me; and I have made arrangements about it. Anything, anything—a glass of cold water, with a quarter of a knob of sugar, suits me well."

However, like most men who speak thus, the traveller was better in his deed, than word; so that three large tumblers of hot rum and water confessed him more capacious than themselves, before he had much to say to them.

"It is a curious story. You misdoubted me out there," he began, with a wave of his glass drumstick towards the garden. "But, Tucker, I have found you now, to be a hearty fellow. The heart, after all, is the real driving power with good fellows, such as you and I are. Hang it, I don't suppose, one man in fifty thousand would have taken up this thing, like me, from pure love of the specie."

"Of the human species," his host amended gently; then, fearful of any rudeness, added—"no doubt you are right, however; the two words are much the same, I do believe."

"To me no matter is of any moment," resumed the red-faced man, with his roses deepening into mulberries, "in comparison with the glow of heart, produced by a noble action. And when we can benefit ourselves as well, what a poor heart it must be, that hesitates! Look at the case, which I have in hand. An amiable but eccentric man, a pattern of every virtue, except the rare one of common sense, takes a turn against all his family! He fancies that they are all set against him, that their views are sordid, and his alone are large; that, as he cannot alter them, his best plan is, to have nothing to do with them, and keep out of their sight. Also he believes, that a man's truest work is, to earn his own living, with his own hands, and wash them clean of all the vices of the world.

In a word, he has crotchets, about society, nature, and things of that sort, to put it clearly. Well, he disappears, without rhyme or reason, having lost the only link that retained him in society, a charming young wife, who was a beauty of this county. He buries himself, in some outlandish region, although he belongs to a distinguished family, and has done a good deal to distinguish himself. No doubt, he believes that he has acted for the best; that he is fulfilling what is called in the cant of the day, 'a lofty mission'; that he stood across the light of other people's prospects, and was bound in duty to obliterate himself; whereas, in reality, he is consulting his own tastes, which are out of all reason, and fantastic.

"Let us say, that his family have long looked upon him as an excellent, but misguided fellow; not a black sheep, but a stray sheep, which will have its own way; and hoping for his happiness, they make no fuss about him. But in the course of years, he becomes more needful; as a snug little property falls to him by succession, and his signature is needed, as a matter of formality, in a settlement of importance. In such a case, he must abandon for a moment his hermitage, receive his dues, and perform his duty. Possibly, he may be induced to return altogether to civilized existence. If so, he will be welcomed by enthusiastic friends, and his history shall appear, in letters of pure gold. On the other hand, if he prefers the seclusion, which must have become his second nature now, he may return to it, with his wheels greased—excuse the coarseness of the allusion, my dear sir; what I mean is, with more butter for his farmhouse bread. Now, what do you think of my proposal?"

"I do not appear to have quite understood," Mr. Tucker replied, very quietly, and slowly, "what proposal there is before me; or even that there is any at all. If not a rude question, in my own house, I would venture to ask, sir, without offence, whether you are a solicitor?"

"Come now, my friend, you are a little too hard on me. When I have tried to make it clear to you, that I desire to do good!"

"I am sure I beg your pardon, sir. But so they may sometimes; I do assure you, I have known it. But since you are not in the law, I may speak freely. And to save you further trouble, I will own right out, that I am pretty sure, by this time, of the gentleman you mean. I know of no great mystery in the matter; and such things are not at all in my line. He wished to be quiet, and undisturbed, as a man might well do in a sad affliction; and as every man has a right to do, if he chooses. I felt the same feeling myself, Mr. Gaston, in the days when the Lord afflicted me."

The voice of the old man trembled slightly, for his affliction was life-long; and this had helped to draw him towards the man in like distress, who had made up his mind, to retire from the world.

"You too have lamented?" said the red-faced man. "It is the lot of us all, my dear sir. But the duty of the strong man is, to up, cast off, and gird himself."

"I will not deny it. But it takes a time to do it, as well as a clear view of the world. And for looking at the world, there are quite as many hills, as there are men to stand on them. But I am keeping you long from your dinner, Mr. Gaston, which I believe you have ordered. You do not expect me to tell you, I suppose, all I know about the gentleman you ask of?"

"If there is anything that I avoid, Tucker," the visitor replied, as he compounded for himself a fourth instalment of rum-punch—"it is the barest semblance of a liberty. Your excellent health, my dear friend! I have never encountered a more harmonious soul. No, no; I only ask you, for the gentleman's address, to do him a genuine, and great kindness."

"It will give me real pleasure," said the host, who was standing, and bowing at the generous carousal in his honour, "to place you in communication with him; upon the receipt of his permission. That is a thing for him to give; and not for me to take as granted. Shall I write, and inform him of your application? Or will you write yourself, Mr. Gaston, and leave it with me to be forwarded? You do not know the name, I think you say—the present name of the gentleman. But if you will use the name you know him by, I will answer for safe delivery. We may save the post, if you begin at once. Here is all you want, including sealing-wax; and I will leave the room while you write, if you think proper."

"Well!" cried the visitor, jumping up, with a force that shook the room, and made the glasses rattle, while his face turned white, and its glow flew to his eyes; "is that all you mean to tell me?"

"I can tell you nothing more," the old man answered, looking at him firmly, but with great surprise; "nothing more; until I get permission. Surely you would not——"

"I forgot one little thing," the other interrupted, as he thrust his hand so violently into a breast-pocket, that the host nearly made up his mind to see a pistol; "I forgot that nothing is to be had for nothing. My mind is so set upon discovering that man, that if fifty pounds—well then, a hundred pounds——"

"Not a thousand, sir; no, nor fifty thousand," Caleb Tucker broke in sternly. "You must be a heartless man, whatever you

may say about your heart, to insult me so. It is lucky for you, that I am not a young man. Leave my house. I am not accustomed to entertain such visitors."

"Over-righteous Caleb," said the red-faced man, recovering his colour, and his temper, or enough of it to supply cool insolence; "we have no faith in all this noble indignation. You know, my remarkably stingy host, upon which side your bread is buttered. And you think to make a good thing, of what you have got out of me. Ta, ta, Master Dry-rot! Your very cheap rum has spoiled my appetite for dinner. I shall go to your cathedral, and pray to be delivered from the company of ancient hypocrites."

CHAPTER X.

ANGELIC PEEPS.

In the waxing of the moon, there are great things done, upon this world of moonshine. Then is the time, to plant the vine, the medlar, and the apple-tree, to ring the store-pig, to inaugurate the capon, and rope the roguish onion—crafty contraband of maiden's lips. Then also, is the time for loftier, and more subtle enterprise; to tempt, or steal, the shy young glance—the flutter of inquiring eyes, the touch clandestine, the irrelevant remark, the sigh about nothing, yet productive of a blush, the blush that increases the confusion it betrays—and a million other little ways of wonder, in the wondrous maze of love.

Even so, and with a multitude of pieces of 16 oz. glass—so called in the trade, but really never more than 14 oz.—sticking in his wounds, with the putty still upon it, Dicky Touchwood came to himself; and lost it, ere ever he had time to scratch it; which is the first of all bodily instincts. For over him leant the very loveliest creature, ever seen out of a dream, or in it. Deep compassion, sweet anxiety, and an inborn dread of the coroner, or the doctor who precedes him, filled the beautiful eyes of Rose Arthur. The youth looked up, and had a very clear idea of having flown up, to what our poets call "the blue."

"Hush!" the maiden whispered, as his lips began to move; "keep your head upon the flower-pot, and try to think of nothing. Never mind, about all the things you have broken. You did not mean to do it, and it can't be helped now. The only thing you

have to do, is to keep as still as possible. Papa is gone to meet Dr. Perperaps, and he may be expected, at any moment. You are to go to sleep, until he comes."

The heavily-wounded youth, instead of obeying orders, gazed the more. To look at her was poetry, and to listen to her was music. But she turned away, and left him nothing for his eyes.

"It must have been an angel. But they have no papas," he began to reason with himself aloud; "and they never would have sent for Dr. Perperaps. None but the devil could have sent for him. Oh, where can I be? What is the meaning of it? And what is this mysterious substance, shed from heaven around me?"

"Brewer's grains," the silvery voice replied; "we have it every spring, to catch the slugs with; and my father put it down, to keep you cool, and moist. It smells very nice; you should be thankful for it."

"So I am. Oh, I am thankful now to be able to smell any beer at all. But I seem to be full of holes, and sore places, and pieces of stuff sticking into me!"

"You could hardly expect, to have no holes yourself, after making such a great hole in our glass; but you must not let that dwell at all upon your mind. My father is a gentleman, who does his own glazing. And really, if you must fall, you have fallen very luckily. Although, when first you look at it, it seems almost an enormous hole, for a smallish boy to have made so quickly."

Richard Touchwood, Esquire, jumped up, when he heard himself called "a smallish boy." Or rather, he tried to jump up, but his swathings stopped him, and then a very jagged barb of pain; and then a light hand replanted him, among the grains, and upon the pot.

"You are too bad," she said; "you want to go everywhere, where you have no business. But oh, I am so sorry for your pain, poor boy! If you would only cry a little, it would do you so much good."

"Cry!" exclaimed Dicky, in a high tone of disdain, yet not wholly out of concert with the course suggested; "have you never even heard that I am a Caius-College man, the place where the very best physicians come from?"

"No, I never heard of that. I have heard of hospitals, and the wards that belong to them; but never of keys colleges. Since you are in training for the medical profession, you ought to try more than you do, to enter into your own position. It is a strict necessity, for you to lie still; but instead of doing that---- Oh, here

comes Dr. Perperaps, crossing our bridge very nicely indeed! And he has brought his daughter, Spotty, with him. He never goes anywhere, without Miss Spotty. Now you will be in better hands than mine. Good-bye."

"Oh, I implore you not to go away. Whoever you are—and I have hardly seen you yet, although I have told you all about myself—do try to see that Dr. Perperaps doesn't kill me."

"Oh no! He's the most kind-hearted man; and exceedingly clever, for a doctor. And when he does happen to make a mistake, his daughter puts it right for him. They are very nice people, and so moderate."

"Don't I know him too well? He pulled out my wrong tooth; and how could his daughter put it in again? I had a bad knee, and he blistered the other, to produce counter-irritation. And once, when a piece of camp-stool ran into me—— Oh, I had better hold my tongue! I know his footstep. I'll be dead—to save him trouble."

"Ah, ha! What have we here? Very sad indeed. Most serious case. Our valued young friend—let us turn him over. A spirited youth—too spirited, in fact. Our great universities produce a kind of comatosis. They overtax corporeal, and relax the mental energies. The result of such a system is before us now."

Dr. Perperaps, as he came to this conclusion, turned to his daughter, who was standing in the doorway; and she said, "Yes. But he has tumbled through the glass."

"That is a minor, but a logical result, of the vicious system I describe. The physical powers have been overdone. The judgment was dormant; or he would not have tried the leap. Now both pay the penalty of disproportion. He does not know me, the truest friend he ever had. It is a beautiful instance of our interdependence."

"Here are the bandages," his daughter said concisely; "and here is cold water. We may be glad, Miss Arthur, of a little warm, if convenient."

"These hasty ways," the doctor whispered to Mr. Arthur, while his daughter set to work, "are entirely the result of the Reform Bill. Spotty was a good girl, until that passed; and so far as that goes, she is a good girl still. But it caused a feminine upheaval, sir; and the wisest man dare not predict the issue. She does the preliminaries; she is wonderfully sagacious; and then the scientific element steps in. Be careful, my dear; be very careful. Lady Touchwood thinks so much of him."

Spotty, who acted as her father's assistant, and better half in his profession, proceeded very strongly, and most skilfully, with her work; while the doctor serenely discussed the case. The hapless rat-hunter had fainted in earnest, at the very first symptom of medical relief; and this was the best thing he could have done. "His wounds were very interesting, and likely to be painful; but properly speaking, not really dangerous to a Cambridge man. No limbs were broken; although the descent was calculated to produce much fracture. And unless inflammatory action supervened, recovery was only a question of time, and of skilful, and unremitting curative appliances." Thus said the doctor; and such was his report, by a boy upon a pony, to Touchwood Park.

While these things were toward, and theory and practice were kissing one another—as they generally do, when the money goes into the same bag—Rose was seeking, at her father's order, a redoubtable person to lend a hand. Captain Larks, with the instinct of a soldier, knew that the medical proceedings would terminate in carrying, as they generally do. Therefore, he got his hand-barrow ready, and sent for an able-bodied man, to share the weight of it. And this was a good workman, when he liked to work, Sam Slowbury, of Brent-fuzz corner.

Slowbury disliked all activity, as heartily as anybody in the parish; and could shirk it, as thoroughly as any man. He entered well into the humour of the contract, in virtue of which a man gets as much money, on a Saturday night, for doing nothing, as for working hard throughout the week, and husbands at once his own resources, and prospective value, by prolonging his job to the uttermost penny.

Such was the integrity of this man, and his principles so uncompromising; so thoroughly did he respect himself, and dignify his vocation, that whether he were out of sight, or whether he were strictly watched, his behaviour was the same. In neither case, would he do a stroke of work, except as the exception. This conduct ensured him universal regard, and more work, than even he could leave undone.

After large, and sweet experience of the British workman, Mr. Arthur had come to the definite conclusion, that these are the men whom it is wisest to employ. Because there is no disappointment with them; no qualm of conscience, at neglecting to look after them; no loss of time, in absurd endeavours to make them do a little work, now and then. There are few greater pleasures, than to contemplate repose; especially when honourably purchased by

oneself; and any employer of Sam Slowbury might always enjoy hat pleasure in perfection. But Sam, to-day, was comparatively at work, having made up his mind to a holiday, and to spend it in the perilous pursuit of the rat. The catastrophe of that great expedition left his mind in a gentle, head-scratching condition, candidly open to a pint of cider; and here he stood now, at one end of the bier.

"Steady!" said the captain, a needless exhortation to a man of Sam's philosophy; then lifting his end of the barrow, upon which the casual visitor had been laid, he led them, down the bloom-roofed alleys, to his cheerful cottage-door. For the green-house, under the cliff, was nearly two hundred yards from his dwelling-place.

"Pardon me, sir, if I speak amiss," said Dr. Perperaps, when they stopped here; "but may I ask you a somewhat important question, round the corner? Spotty, attend to the patient. Now, sir, it is this," he continued in a low tone, as soon as Mr. Arthur followed him, "we have reason to believe, that you value very highly, as every good Englishman has a right to do, your privacy, your retirement—I might say, your charming seclusion from the world. Now, this boy's mother, Lady Touchwood, is—ah well—you understand me."

"I have merely heard her name; I know nothing more about her. What is she, for me to be afraid of?"

"Not at all, my dear sir; you misunderstand me. Her ladyship is a delightful person, until—until her feelings overpower her. Charitable, kind-hearted, hospitable, devout, elegant in her manners, and fond of making presents—a very fine quality, growing rarer every year,—still, she does want to get to the bottom of everything; doubtless from intensity of sympathy. And if anybody baffles her, she becomes the very devil. Pardon me, Captain Larks, I speak in strictest confidence; but I have reason to believe, that her ladyship's attention has been directed, with some interest, to you. If once she gets admission to your little household (which you cannot well deny her, if you take in her son), as soon as her alarm about him is over, she will begin to feel an undesirable interest in everything concerning you."

"Dr. Perperaps," answered Mr. Arthur, "it is most obliging of you, to show such consideration for my wishes."

The doctor, a short, well rounded man, came one step nearer, and behind the silver head of the black bamboo, which he always carried, relaxed his dignity with a wink.

"It is not altogether that," he said; "I consider my own conve-

nience also. I am not so young as I was ; and I don't want to walk up your hill, twice a day. And distance is a professional element. Touchwood Park is three times as far off ; and a carriage would be sent for me. The patient may very well be taken, as he is, to my little residence, and go home, upon springs, in a day or two. His affectionate mother would send for me, twice every day ; and with prophylactic, as well as remedial measures—— "

"I am much obliged to you ; but it will not do. The boy has been wounded on my premises ; and with me he shall stay, until his relatives remove him. I should feel that I had done an inhuman thing, if I sent him from my door, in his present condition. Say no more about it, sir ; but come in, and help us."

The doctor gave in, as he could not help doing, but said to himself, that he should have his revenge ; for he knew a little more of Lady Touchwood, than Captain Larks could dream of. And he saw a good chance of some pleasant excitement, and matters of deep interest to be told to his good wife, when Spotty, and the little ones, were gone to bed, and the toddy was being measured in the Apostle's spoon. Like nearly all medical men in country places, he had a hard time of it ; being at everybody's beck and call ; and called for almost everything, except to take his money.

And so, when evening came down upon the hills, and the hills tried to pass it off in shadow to the valleys, there was no more comfortable fellow to be found, within the enclosure of their deepening folds, than little Dicky Touchwood at Larks' cot. By the strong arms of Spotty, and the nimble hands of Rose, a bed was provided for him, in the captain's sitting-room—a pretty little place, with a door opening into the span-roof vinery. Here lay the youth, upon the best bed of the cottage ; with three bottles of mixture, tied over at the top with white, like sisters of mercy, and a basin of soup keeping warm, upon one of Mr. Arthur's devices for slaying green-fly ; and best of all cordials– in his present state of heart—bright glimpses of the lovely Rose, that flitted to and fro.

He would have known better, than to let his mind wander, about pretty figures, and after sweet faces, and into, and out, of a thousand vagaries of smile, and of sigh, and of tremulous delight, if the glass of the green-house had begun to hurt him yet, or the putty to torment him, as they meant to do to-morrow. For the present, he was grateful for every single hole made in him (so long as lard, and liniment, prevented it from smarting) as a trifle of punctuation, needful before the great impression of his life was struck.

"Now, Master Touchwood, how often must I tell you," said

Spotty, who was left, to help as nurse, "that you are not to roll, like that? It loosens all the fastenings, and it will set up inflammation."

"I don't care two skips of a—flower, if it does. I must see my angel; and I can't see through the bed-post."

"I tell you once more, there is no angel here. The old women call me a ministering angel, when the parish allows them a noggin of gin. But I know well enough, that I am not angelic."

"As if I meant you!" the patient answered, with more sincerity than courtesy. "You are very kind indeed, and you rub up the rags, like silver paper, and you make them soft. But the other—oh, Miss Perperaps, what a perfect, perfect angel!"

"It is time for you to have this draught. Your tongue is white. That comes of talking about angels so. To make a face is useless. You must have it. I dare say it is nasty. Shall the angel come, and give it you?"

"Oh no! Please not to let her see me take it. I always make such horrid faces. And I want her to think, how nice I am. If I could only get it down, while she is round the corner."

"Wait, till I shake the bottom up. The best of the flavour is always there. Now take it, like a man; and I will let her know, how brave you were."

"But Spotty—or at least I mean, Miss Perperaps, do you think it will really make any difference with her? Are you sure that she will have a high opinion of me—if—if I do it?"

"I am certain that she will. She sighed, and she said 'Poor fellow!' twice over, when she saw the bottles come. If you wish to be a hero, put your head the proper way, and open your mouth, and shut both eyes."

So absorbing was the power of love at first sight, that Dicky took his medicine like a martyr, and even pretended that he found it nice.

"Here is your reward! I will tell her of your goodness; how pleased she will be!" exclaimed his nurse; "because she knows so well, what a job it is to make you. She will hardly believe her own ears."

"I don't understand you. How can she know about it, when she never set eyes on me, before to-day?"

"I don't mean the angel," answered Spotty, with a laugh; "or at least, I mean your proper one—your dear mamma. Here comes Lady Touchwood."

"Oh, bother!" cried the young squire; "don't let her in. Say,

that you've got orders—say, that it will kill me—say anything you like—say they're laying me out."

"Oh, Master Dicky, you ungrateful wretch! If I only had a mother, to make a fuss about me! Would I ever shut her out, that I might carry on with angels?"

Poor Spotty was the daughter of a departed Mrs. Perperaps; and her stepmother (having many interesting babes, of far greater value than Sporetta) employed that young lady for the best part of her time, in the genial occupations of the nursery, and wash-house. This damsel, being gifted with a great love of the healing art, was now beginning to revolt at large, from the drudgery of pail, and pan; and her father, who was not a fool (although he used the jargon of that race), perceived, in this daughter, a revival of the fine enthusiasm, which had pulled him down. In the fervour of youth, he had nourished gay ideas of making great discoveries, and doing lots of good; and happily he did no harm, except unto himself. Among his lucid theories, was a grand one about spores, as the protoplasm, or proto-phantasm, of all sporadic existence. And his child appearing, on the same day as his book, in spite of her mother, he would have her name—"Sporetta." Her name lasted longer than the book, because it appealed to a larger audience, and nobody could make out what it meant. But soon even this sweet association vanished; for Sporetta took the chicken pox, before her skin was hardened; and no hundred-headed Stentor, with a high-pressure boiler, and three steam-whistles in his every mouth, nay, nor even the foremost statesman of the age, might ever have stormed people's eyes, through their ears, to believe that the child was not spotty. Her name had begun to be "Spotterer" already; and now as the polystigmatic view deepened, her name accrusted finally to the positive form of "Spotty."

CHAPTER XI.

MOTHER DEAR.

When two persons, as widely asunder in nature, as she ever le us be, having long held imaginary notion of each other, for the fir time come together in the bodily form, under stress of circumstance, what becomes of all they meant to do? Some men have had the happiness to see two dogs, who have been chained up, for some

months of moonlight, within barking distance of each other, and having higher gifts than we possess, have appraised one another without interview, according as the wind blew to and fro—to behold these twain dogs meet upon the highway, at length and at last, for the very first time, on a day when there is wind enough to blow their tails off. Either dog has made his mind up, as to how he will behave; each knows every corner of his adversary's mouth, and which of his teeth has been broken by a bone; he has learned every item of his brother barker's story (from his howls to the man in the moon, to come and help him), and sitting on his haunches, he has fifty times rehearsed his proceedings with that noisy dog, when he shall come across him. Yet now, when the blissful opportunity is come, when the other dog is looking at him, smaller than his bark was, and easier to thrash than he ever has imagined him, does he fall upon, and rend him? No, not he; tails wag across the gale, with growing cordiality; sniffs try to baffle facts; good will is mutual; the weather is too bad, for any dog to say a word upon any other subject. In half a minute, they have managed to smell up a fundamental friendship; and henceforth, if they bark of nights, it will not be at, but with, each other.

Now Lady Touchwood, and Captain Larks, acted very differently from this. Their manner was as full of common sense, and of waiting for a leading question from each other, as Cæsar's and Lion's, may be at first sight; but they failed of the insight, which man, (the only animal capable of envy), decries as instinct.

"I suppose this is the house of Captain Larks," said the lady in the little porch, looking at the owner, who had got his bridge down, and his door wide open. "Dr. Perperaps is with me. I am come to see my son, who has met with a very sad accident, I fear. Perhaps you are Captain Larks himself."

"I believe that I have the honour to bear that name," Mr. Arthur replied, with a very stiff bow; "at least in this part of the country. The boy is in no danger; but severely cut, and shaken."

"I suppose you will not refuse me liberty to see him. Perhaps in such a question, the very best judge is his mother." Lady Touchwood spoke sharply, and with what she took for irony.

"There is not any question in the case, that I am aware of. And there can be no question, as to your right to see him. Be careful, if you please; there is an awkward step here. Rose, my darling, Lady Touchwood will follow you. Hold your candle higher, that's a dear little child. My daughter, Lady Touchwood! Allow me to introduce her."

"Well!" communed the visitor, with her own heart only; "things must be come to a very pretty pass, when a man, who has run away from justice, and lives by selling pears, and apples, introduces his daughter to me, and orders me to follow her! And Mr. Short upbraids me with my quick temper! If he could see me now—— But never mind; they shall know my opinion of them, when Dicky can be moved."

In a very few minutes, however, Lady Touchwood began to waver largely, in her opinion of them; even as the tail of the inimical dog —whose "emotional condition" has been analysed above—unconsciously relaxes, from the wiry cock of defiance, first to the crisp bend of inquiry, then to the pleasing wave, of interest and sympathy, and lastly to the woolly wag, of amity, and brotherhood. So pervading is the tendency towards good will, in the breast of all decent mammalia.

There could be no doubt, that much trouble had been taken, for the comfort and welfare of the adventurous rat-hunter: the motherly perception took this in, at a glance; and the deep sleep of the wounded one (which he suddenly accomplished) appealed to the tenderest, and most sacred feelings of maternity.

"Poor darling!" the mother whispered, having kissed his marble forehead; "how beautifully regular his breathing is! He always had that gift, whatever happened to him. Can I ever show my gratitude to heaven, Miss Larks, for the providential fact, that his features are uninjured? His features have been declared, by the first sculptor of the age, to be of the very purest classical ideal. Whether he said Doric, or Ionic, or perhaps Gothic, I will not be certain, at this exciting period."

"We made sure at first, that his nose was cut in two," replied Spotty Perperaps, who had done the lion's share, and would not be put in the background, like that; "but it turned out to be a stripe of red lead, my lady; and when I sponged it off, I found his dear nose all right."

"His dear nose, indeed! Who is this young female? Oh, the doctor's daughter, Spotty! Yes, I heard that you were here."

"And a good job for Master Dicky, that I came up with father," said the spirited Miss Perperaps, in a tone of self-assertion; "such little things as this always come into my compass."

The sturdy manner, and rather rough appearance of the damsel —too important as she was, to be affronted just now—brought into sweet contrast the gentle demeanour, and sympathising glances of

the other young lady ; who kept herself in the background, and then retired into the passage.

"Poor darling ! Precious sufferer ! I will disturb him no longer," Lady Touchwood whispered gently, as she tucked her Dicky's ears up. "Though it would have been such a rapture, to hear him even breathe my name. But heaven, in its wisdom, has sent this balmy slumber. Come forward, my dear ; you are a very nice young lady. Miss Larks, I am pleased with you. Your behaviour is most becoming. You have never said a word, since I came in ; though you cordially feel for me, in this sad affliction. Of course you are not a nurse, or anything of that kind. Miss Perperaps, who is so clever, and accustomed to it, will be quite indefatigable, I am sure, and will find me full of gratitude. But you, my dear, may also be of very great assistance to us ; and I am certain, from your lovely eyes, that you are kind, and gentle."

Rose Arthur, being very shy with strangers, and reluctant always to be made conspicuous, came forward, just as far as manners, and her sense of obedience prescribed. There, the light of two candles (a gallant dip, and a lordly tallow-mould) combined to play upon her blushing cheeks, white forehead, and softly sparkling eyes. And strange to say, another pair of eyes (supposed to be buried in deep repose) contrived to unclose themselves, and steal a narrow glance, through glimmering lashes, as children "draw straws" from the fire.

"If I can be of any use," said Rose, "in any way whatever—I mean of course for messages, or outdoor work"—she qualified her offer, because she met the patient's eager gaze at her—"any little things, to save Miss Perperaps from—from coming away too much ; I shall be very glad to be of use, I'm sure."

"I thought that I heard a heavy sigh,"—Lady Touchwood turned, as she spoke ;—"surely our precious sufferer——Dicky, dear, are you conscious of my presence, and pining for me ?"

A snore of the highest artistic order, superior to nature's sweetest effort, conveyed, to the mother's yearning heart, a solace at the same time, and yet a disappointment.

"I will suppress my very natural desire," she whispered to Rose, while Spotty turned away, and indulged in a broad grin, out of the window ; "my fond wish to hear, if it were but a single syllable, from those dear lips. It is wrong, and selfish of me. How thankful should I be, for the balmy depth of this repose! That is how he always sleeps, Miss Larks, ever since he fell and indented his ligaments, the day he was put into small clothes. I never quite under-

stood what the process was; the result, however, has been remarkable. On no account let him be disturbed to-night, by so much as the mention of my name. He will not awake, for ten hours now. I know all his ways, so thoroughly. Sleep on, darling, and the angels be with you."

"You don't deserve to have such a ma," said Spotty, running up to her patient, as soon as his mother was out of earshot; "not to give her a kiss, or so much as a word!"

"It is all very fine for you to talk," the youth replied, to soothe his conscience, by strong statement of his case; "you don't know anything at all about it. Do you suppose, that I could put up, with being cried over, and kissed, and cuddled, and called all sorts of nursery names, in the sight and hearing of—I mean while she—while other persons at least, who cannot be expected to know my proper age——"

"Oh, indeed! I see. To be sure!" exclaimed Miss Perperaps; "you want to be taken for a man, before your time. You seem to have conceived an extraordinary affection, for somebody, instead of your mother. Lady Touchwood is talking with Captain Larks; now it will make her more happy, if I tell her all about it."

"If you do, I will tear every bandage off, and my death will lie at your door, Spotty. I have got an old watch, that I had at school; it is out of fashion now, but it goes very well; and I'll give it to you, if you only do your duty to me. People run you down, I know; but in my opinion you are wonderfully clever."

"No, Master Dicky, I am not at all that. But I see a great many stupid things done by people, who ought to know better. Marrying again, for instance, and having other children; what do you think of that, Mr. Touchwood!"

"A man when he marries," said Dicky with solemnity, and hoping that somebody might be listening in the passage, "swears upon the Bible, to have only one wife, to cleave to her, to stick to her, to love, honour, and obey her. How can he do that, I should like to know, if he goes, and gets married to another woman? Besides, we are told, and I have to attend Divinity lectures, I assure you, that no man can be blameless, except he be the husband of one wife. And that is how I intend to conduct myself."

"How I wish that my pa," said Miss Perperaps, with a sigh, "had attended Divinity lectures. But hush, Master Dicky, I can hear my lady going, and my dear papa is doing Dixon to her; you know what that means in our practice, I suppose!"

"No, I never heard of it. They don't show us things at

Cambridge. Oh, Spotty, I do like you so, because you don't care!"

"But I do care. And that makes me see how things are. A Dixon is a swing-cask, a sort of water-barrow, a tub upon pins between two wheels, for going down the walks with. They have got one in your father's place. They are all very well, while they stand at the pump, because there is a shore to them. But if you want to make them go, you have to be very careful. If you put too much in them, they kick up one way; and if you put too little, they kick up the other, and your trouble goes for nothing."

"I can understand that well enough," answered Dicky, whose mind was by no means of electric speed; "but what has it got to do, with the doctor, and my mother?"

"Everything," said Spotty, with a look of some contempt; "if my father were to make too much of your injuries, he would terrify your mother, and she would fetch a man from Exeter. So the tub would go over, from having too much in it. But if he made too little of your mishap, why then it would be almost worse, for the tub would go over the other way, because of being empty."

"I wish you would talk plain English, Spotty. All your stuff comes in bottles. What have tubs got to do with it? But perhaps you make enough to last the twelvemonth, at one brewing. I can see what you mean about another man coming; but I don't see what harm could come of making little of it."

"Very well, if you can't see, you are not worth telling. I would not have told you what I have, only for the way in which they trampled upon me. My dear pa is gone to see my lady to her carriage, that wouldn't come up the hill, because it is so rocky. Ah, I do admire Captain Larks, for living where people must alight from their chariots, to get at him."

"Spotty, you are a radical. I used to be one, when I was very young, and could not see the mischief of it. Wise people must be made to leave it off. But politics always make me sleepy. Go, and see whether my mother is clean gone, and whether your father means to plague me any more. It shall never be said of me, that I made a fuss about a trifle. I dare say you would like to hear me groan. Girls always do; because then they can boast about having their teeth out, and all that, better than we men do. But I am as game as a three-legged rat."

"Just you wait a bit, before you boast," Miss Perperaps answered, as she went to fetch her father; "your troubles are not begun yet,

Master Dicky; the wound in your tibia has got some bull's-eye glass in it, and what is worse to my mind, green scum of rotten whiting. If you don't begin to squeak to-morrow, for certain you will, on Sunday."

CHAPTER XII.

"NOUS."

THE idea is a good one. Sometimes there is a dove-tail to be made, of cross purposes, when laid aright." Mr. Short said this to his well-beloved *Nous*, as they sat down together, to consider their breakfast and the business of the day, on a very nice Monday morning. Monday morning is the sweetest of the week, not only for parsons, but for dogs as well; for they both have passed through tribulation yesterday, and are all the better for it; and best of all, have six days before them, ere the trial comes again.

Perhaps, it would be too wide a statement, to aver that a parson is bound officially to feel a depression of his bright, elastic, and naturally large mind, and to get up at a low level, upon a Sunday morning. He means to preach admirably, and he does it (often with some drain upon his own resources); he has many sound ideas, which he wants to watch, in their movement into wakeful minds; and perhaps the very last of his desires is, to let anybody else come, and do it better for him. Still he is glad, and it is a proof of his humility to be so, when he has done his duty.

His dog, on the other hand, if tenderly attached to him—as a parson's dog is sure to be—rejoices with a treble bark, when the trying day is over. In the present "distracted condition of the church," he is not allowed to go there, though his clerical ancestors may have made a point of it. Sitting on the bricks, outside his kennel, he hears the fine call of the bells, and he smells the swing of the man, and of the boy, who are ringing, because they both work in the vicarage garden. Then he sees a lot of people in the foot-path meadow (where a hare has a seat, to his certain knowledge, and a wedded pair of partridges come almost every evening) gingerly walking, with their best clothes on, and trying not to make too much noise, because they are getting near the churchyard. They have got a dog with them; and his jealousy suggests, that a lay dog will be let in, where he is not. He quickens in his fore-legs, and gives a distant "wuff" at him, with a shake of his ears,

and a toss of his nose, and a hope that he may know how to behave himself.

Then comes his final misery, the last straw that breaks his back. He has seen the two girls go, with their Sunday stripes, and flarings on, and their yellow cotton gloves, too fine for him to sniff at; also the boy who sweeps him up is gone—which was a pang to him, greater than that of petticoats—but when his master comes out the back way, locks the door, and hides the key in a clump of violets, and then with his sermon in the Spanish-leather case, scarcely vouchsafes him a one-handed pat, with a long reach, and a sidelong passage (because of his best black kersey), and is gone round the corner, with a flutter of his coat, too full of eloquence to talk to a dog—then he puts down his tail in the hole, he scratched advisedly, sits down, to keep down with it, and humbles all his arrogance, and the best-plumed portions of his very noble frame, by revolving on his haunches, with his nose up high supinely, and his heart appealing to his lungs, to come up with it in an unexampled howl.

Nous, having passed through all this anguish yesterday, as usual, was now in the highest of high spirits, this fine Monday morning. He had heard his master order the horse *Trumpeter* to be thoroughly well-fed, and ready for a long ride, at half-past nine o'clock; and *Nous* had ascertained, without putting one objectionable question, that he was to go too. He had been to the stable, and the kitchen, and the larder, and several other places too; and all of these, with one accord, announced that *Nous* was going. If there had been any doubt about it, even at the pessimistest moment, the quantity of really fine victuals set before him was enough to convince him most delightfully. "Lay you in a broad, and good foundation for the day, my friend," said his master to him; and it would have been redundant to repeat the order.

But apart from the question of nourishment, however urgent and agreeable, this dog deserves, and in his own right demands, consideration. He was not one of those gigantic fellows, who are patronized with some tender alarm concerning the issue, if they take it amiss; neither was he one of those little whipper-snappers, whom it is not worth while to propitiate. The first question asked about a dog, by a man, is almost sure to be an invidious, and rude one, and mainly ungrammatical—"What breed is he?"

When John Sage of Christowell, who was famous for shedding his own light on things, was told that a nobleman (too well known in the neighbourhood) was of very long descent, he shook his head,

and said that he could understand it now. "He hath not dooed it, of a zudden then," said John; "he hath a' been coomin' down, all that wai." But *Nous*, though of long descent, was not come down like that; and the purity of his lineage shone forth in every lineament. A setter of generous birth was he, sable, distinguished with spots and gold, such as we men call "black and tan;" flued, and feathered, and fringed with gold, so that while drawing on a covey up the gale, he resembled sombre night prolonged in pencils of Aurora. This may seem a rose-coloured picture of the dog, to those who have not the delight of looking at him, which really prevented some sportsmanlike artists from hitting the partridges, when they got up. Still even now, in his homelier moments, while begging for bacon, or chewing the rind (which seems to puzzle dogs' teeth, more than tougher substance does), he deserved to be regarded, with eyes as attentive as his own; than which no more can well be said. For nothing was small enough to escape his eyes, or large enough to out-gauge them; but in his broad, calm pupils, all might be discovered, as in a lens reposing, for him to think about. The clear depth of the rich brown iris spoke of contemplation, placid, and too profound for doubt, and a sensitive yearning to be praised, and patted. The loveliest lady in the land has not such eloquent, lucid, loving eyes; and even if she had, they would be as nothing, without the tan spot over them. Neither might any lady vie with him, for accuracy, length, and velvet texture, and delicately saline humidity of nose.

"*Nous*," said his master, whose thoughts were quick enough for one of our race, but very slow against a dog's, "things have turned out very pleasantly for us. If I had been obliged to go on Saturday, I should have doubted about taking you, because I must have meditated over my sermon, and you are a distracting animal. If you come across grouse on the hills, or even a snipe, or a plover, you insist upon working the question out, without any regard for their connubial state. But now upon a Monday, I am as free as you are. You shall enjoy yourself; and so will I."

For the vehement lady herself had called, upon her return from the "scene of probation"—meaning Mr. Arthur's cottage—and begged the good vicar to put off his trip; for she could not think twice about the wilful Julia, while her dear obedient boy lay on a bed of suffering, through his self-sacrificing heroism. Oh, if it only had been Julia, she said, it would have been so much nicer then, to recognize the hand of Providence! Mr. Short smiled dryly, and revolved in his mind some rumour that had reached him, concerning

bottled beer. But he gladly put off his long ride till the Monday, and paid a short visit, on Saturday, to the interesting Dicky, who was now shedding salt tears into water-gruel, and gazing at three bottles, hatted with pill-boxes, and booted to the knees with slimy sediment. Spotty stood before him, and he knew that words were vain, and the deepest sigh would be no more than a signal for a gargle.

Now, Mr. Short loved both his horse, and his dog; and to see them thus full of the joy of the outbreak, from stable and kennel, and the glory of the air, and the hope of adventure, and distinction, and renown, was sure to set his own spirit capering with theirs, and the dark soul of man flitting into sunny places, and even the mind soaring into the air, out of which it was taken, and to which it shall return. The air was more delightful than the mind to-day; and to ride was far better than to reason.

"Halloa, *Nous*, you should have done your pranks by this time," the master shouted to him, as the dog stood still, suddenly, amazedly, and with a headlong point; as a young dog, rashly scouring, does too late, when he is almost on the tails of game; "an old stager, like you, should know better than that. No birds can be here; yet you never stand a lark. A hare on her form, no doubt of it. Down wind on a hare, with his nose upon her back. *Nous* would stay there all day; I must go up, and see."

It is a fine, and ardent sight, to see a noble dog, ranging as freely as the wind, check his long stride, stand still, and stiffen, with his fore feet planted upon the advance, his arched loins straightened into a hard strung line, his head (that was tossing on high just now) levelled, and rigid as an anvil's nose; his upper lip quivering, despite his iron will, and the fixed eyes labouring to learn from their own whites, whether the master is hurrying up to shoot. Meanwhile the hare—for a bird very seldom abides to be considered so intently—crouches into the closest compass, with every sinew on the spring, yet still; and suppressing every ruffle of her gingery fluff, lowers the lids of her soft bright eyes, for fear of a sparkle through the russet of her flax; while she watches every hair's breadth of her enemy, and hopes that nobody has seen her.

Expecting to rejoice in this well-known sight, and the blissful bound of the unchased hare, when the dog lies down, and never stirs an inch, but bedews the ground from the fountain of his mouth, the vicar turned *Trumpeter's* head, and rode up, to release the good dog from his statuary state. "Toho, *Nous!*" he said, just to keep up the tradition; though the dog was too wise to want admonition. But to his surprise, a great change came over the spirit of the

animal, and his body also, ere ever the horse's hoofs were nigh. The first sign of weakness was a flutter of the tail, a delicate tremor of the golden brush, in which an artistic dog concludes. Then the firm line of the back relaxed, the curved ears fell, and the countenance looked foolish ; and after a feeble sniff, or two, the whole dog set off helter skelter, down the dingle, at whose head he had been standing, like a statue. There was no hare before him ; neither anything moving, in the long desolation, except himself.

" Now, this is to my mind a horrible puzzle," the vicar exclaimed, as he pulled up at the spot, where the false point had so long held good ; " *Nous* never chases fur, or feather ; and if he did, there is none to be chased. He has made a thorough fool of himself for once. But no, I beg his pardon. There has been some scamp here, and he has killed a sheep, I see ! Come back, come back, my darling, or you will get a knife stuck into you."

In an agony of dread, for he loved his dog most dearly, and the rocky dell forbade all hope of riding to his succour, he put his nails between his lips, and gave a long shrill whistle ; and the dog's obedience saved his life. In the distance, down at the end of the combe, a pale blue mist overhung a morass, in which a little stream lost itself. *Nous*, in full gallop down the grass track, stopped short at the whistle, with a big stone just beside him, and a heavy charge of duck-shot scattered peat, and moss, around him. But the big stone had sheltered him, and not a hair was hurt of him, while the roar of the gun rang up the hollow, and the smoke of strong powder spread a dirty blur before the clean blue mist. From the mixture of vapours, a figure with a long gun strode forth rapidly, to bag poor *Nous ;* but he, with his innocent tail between his legs, and a deep (but brief) sympathy for creatures that are shot at, was swallowing the hard ground, best foot foremost, by the way that he came, and thanking his stars to be rid of a rogue, and to see his good master.

If ever, in the history of the church, any parson has been unfitted by his own " emotions "—which is now become the proper English name of wrath, shame, desire, revenge, and other good and bad feelings—for delivering with emphasis one short, and strong commandment, while thoroughly fitted for the breach of that same, that man was now Vicar of Christowell. Saddened, and cowed by the narrow escape, which had shaken his faith in humanity (because he understood a gun so well, and took such pleasure in its proceedings, when it shot at the proper animals), *Nous* lay down, before *Trumpeter's* feet, and panted, and looked very piteously up ; for

his self-esteem held two deep wounds, of the false point, and of being fired at.

Having been at Winchester, and New College (seats of the Muses, where they are so much at home, that their language is not always foreign), Parson Short used a short word; who shall heed what it was, if it bettered his philanthropy? Then he jumped from his horse, and bent over the dog, in quick fear of finding some big shot-hole; so sad were his favourite's attitude, and gaze.

Like every other creature, this dog most heartily loathed examination, and strove to escape it, by offering paws, and by putting up his nose, as no candidate can do.

"You old humbug, you are not hurt a bit. All that you want is, to be made much of; because you have made such a fool of yourself. Hi, find!—fetch—drop! Now you are yourself again. Let us see, what there has been here, to make such a mighty fuss about."

Nous, having flipped in, and out of, the heather, after his master's glove, and brought it, with the greater agility of the canine mind, had recovered his balance, and was equal to his duties. With his valuable nose, he described exactly the outline of the form, which he had taken for a hare's, and dwelled more especially upon those spots, which retained the warmest impress of the shape we so admire. "He had no more than two legs,"—*Nous* pronounced as he smelled him out—"and two things here, that you call arms; and he lay upon his back, and he had no tail. And my opinion of him is, that he was very dirty."

"Never mind; it is no use to think any more about it," Mr. Short replied, as his manner was, to his dog's observations; "there is no getting near the fellow, be he who he may. And since he has not hit you, my good *Nous*, I have chiefly to regret, that the arch-enemy was so sharp, as to take advantage of my anxiety about you."

Thus, in a comparatively thankful mood, these two went upon their way together; for the nature of the ground forbade all hope of pursuing the hang-dog skulker. But Mr. Short felt that his spirits were dashed, and docked of their bright April flow, by such a nasty outrage, within five miles of his own warm, and hospitable roof. His character was well known, and valued, all over the eastern side of the moor, among the few people, who dwelled, or wandered there. Not a whit less known was the character of *Nous*, wherever there was any heart capable of valuing integrity, docility, gallantry, and faith. No moorman would ever dream "of letting off his gun"—as

they always express it—at Parson Short's *Nous;* even if he had a gun, which was not a common thing with them.

It must be some fellow, of the outlaw sort, was the only conclusion Mr. Short could form—such as came harbouring, and harassing most grievously, treading the loose foot-prints of the Gubbins' family, striking every traveller with terror, and dismaying all quiet people, round the verges of the waste. The great Castle-prison, in which all the sadness of the long moor culminates, was empty at this time, and faced the sunshine—whenever there was any—with peaceful moss. Neither warrior, nor felon, could have crept from out its gloom, to crouch in the bog by day, and prowl among the sheep at night.

However, Mr. Short, possessing that invaluable gift, a sweet and happy mind, rode on ; and a league, or two, of moorland breeze, in trackless space, where distant tors are the traveller's direction-posts, began to make him feel, how small, and ludicrous is human wrath. His course lay, as nearly as might be, north-west, over some of the highest land of Dartmoor ; for his old friend's house, which he had not yet seen, stood below the north-western parapet of highland, two, or three, miles to the south-west of Okehampton, and a little way back from the Tavistock road. Well as he knew his own side of the moor, he was taken aback by some pieces of travel, which he met between Yes-tor and Cranmere pool ; but hitting the West Ockment, near Black-tor, he contrived to get down to Okehampton Park.

On the Tavistock road, which he was truly glad to reach, he saw, as he rode up the bank from the river, a young man walking briskly, with a handsome setter-pup, about six months old, and of white and lemon colour, with legs, and tail as yet unfringed. The motto of *Nous*, as of all dogs then, was "*canis sum, nihil canini*," &c. ; and therefore up he ran, though his bronzy toes were becoming rather sore, to pass the time of day, to this young member of his race. The white and lemon animal saluted him, as was decent, and then kindly submitted to further olfaction, lowering his tail, in token of communion with his elder, with a dog of dignity, and established position in the world. *Nous* was naturally pleased with this, although it is the duty which all pups render—if they desire to grow on into tax-payers—and he pleasantly allowed the adolescent dog to skip, and vault around him ; while he wagged his own tail slightly, and sniffed, with a critical air, at the salutation offered. Then the dog of experience warned the pup, that he had said his say, and been accepted with indulgence, and must consider this

interview closed, unless he were prepared to have tooth, instead of tongue. *Nous* was very seldom crusty; but to be shot at, and to jog along for hours, without seeing game, and to get raw toes, tries even a dog's philosophy.

"I take leave to apologize for my dog's growls," said Mr. Short, riding up with *Trumpeter*, who shook his legs out, as he felt them on a tidy road once more; "but he will not hurt your young dog, sir."

"Thank you; I am not afraid of that," replied the other; "I was only looking at your dog, because I like them; and he seems a very fine one."

"He is a very fine one, and not to be matched, I believe, in the four counties. But will you kindly tell me, where Colonel Westcombe lives? It must be somewhere about here."

"Not more than a mile; and I am going straight home. You have ridden far to-day, sir, and come across the moor. My father has long been hoping to see an old friend—Mr. Short, of Christowell."

"I am the man; and you are young Jack Westcombe; or at least you ought to be, because there is no other." The vicar was so pleased to see his old friend's son, and to find him to his liking, that he shaped his sentence anyhow, got off his horse, and took him by both hands, and examined him, as carefully as if he were a nag, whose price he meant to have £5 off.

Knowing that he meant him well, and was not trying to abate him, Jack Westcombe looked him in the face, with a shy, but pleasant expression, and a twinkle of goodwill.

Then the vicar said, "Yes, you are the image of your father; only taller, and slighter, and your nose is straighter; and you look as if you stood upon your own rights more. I fear, you will never be equal to him. That, of course, is not to be expected. Still, you may do well enough, for the rising generation. We don't expect the young dogs to come up to the old ones. But march on, and let me have a good look at you. You are like your father, in one thing, and that a very great one—you don't want to talk too fast, young Master Jack."

The young man, smiling at the short ways of the parson, did as he was ordered; *Trumpeter*, being gifted with a Roman nose, tossed it, and made good his name, by a lively blare to some large stables, which he espied in the distance, and hoped to flourish there in, a stall, and a manger *non ignobilis oti*. In reply, the rooks began to caw, the queists to flit out of the ivied elms, the little dog, and the

big dog, to yelp and bay, respectively, the gardener (who was resting on his laurels) to get up, the young lady, reading in a snaily chair, to yawn, and all the other things conspired to embrace the rare opportunity of saluting the new arrival, at an ancient country-house.

CHAPTER XIII.

OLD FRIENDS AND YOUNG ONES.

SHELTERED from the west winds, by the first of the range of hills, that trend away towards Cornwall, and from the east, by Dartmoor, Westcombe Hall is as nice a place, as any lover of a samely life, and a changeful landscape, may desire. For the beauty of the hills is variety of rigour, and the beauty of the valley is variety of softness; and the comfort of the home-life, is to see them, and be steadfast. Colonel Westcombe entered into such things calmly, without any consideration of them, after the battle of life, he had been through.

The cawing of the rooks was a settled pleasure to him, and the lowing of the distant cows a space of soothing interest; the trees, and all the garden-plants (of which he had small knowledge) excited him to think about them, from the sense of ownership; and he began to study cocks and hens, without any skewers through them. For still he was as lively as ever he had been; and the quantity of carnage, he had smelled in fields of glory, acquitted these, his elder days, of the younger duty to destroy.

"Short, you see those trees," he said, as he sauntered forth, with that old friend, after dining at the old-fashioned hour, five o'clock; "wait a moment, come in here; never mind the young folk, they will get on well enough; though I don't want Jack to have her. Now here we can have a delicious little smoke. You like a pipe, so do I; not cigars—I have seen too much of the way they make them. Very well; help yourself. How glad I am to see you!" This was the fiftieth time of saying that; but the parson said, "And so am I," very nearly every time. "You see those trees, there," continued Colonel Westcombe, leaning back in his bower arm-chair; "they are a little green with moss, and so on—soft to the eye. I should call it, Short."

"It is the duty of a tree to be as green as possible;" Mr. Short answered, with a puff of blue smoke.

"You always cut my corners off. I mean, that the trunks of the trees are green; and that is not their duty. Well, this fellow, who is considered, and may be, the shining light of the neighbourhood, counselled me to peel off all the green, and treat the fine old fellows to three coats of whitewash. A pleasant view we should have had, from the windows, all the summer! What do you say to that? You know everything."

"Do I? I don't know that, to begin with. The extent of my knowledge is, to know how much I know; for which I heartily thank Oxford. But I do know a man, who understands such things, and could give you the very best advice. Or rather I mean,—he is not to be had now; no, no, we must not think of him."

"That reminds me," his host replied, "of the wonderful fellow in your parish, Short. A gentleman, you say he is; and you are no bad judge. You held out some hopes, that we might see his place; and what would please me even more, see him. You know that I am foolish, as my nature is, about things that come up, and take my fancy. I don't want to spend a lot of cash, of course; nobody ever does; and how can I tell, that I may not be turned out again, neck and crop? Another will might be discovered; or what not? And I am not sure that I should lament it very much. I like to do things for myself; and I believe every man under Wellington got into that style. We had no fine gentlemen, I can tell you; none of your Pompey's officers. But no more of that—you have heard it too often. All I meant to say is, that I want to get this place into a little better order; partly, because I like to see things decent, and partly because the people round about are not very well off; and yet to offer them money, except as wages, is an insult."

This was a very long piece of discourse, for Colonel Westcombe to get through, without stopping; although he could tell a long story very well, when he thought it his duty, and got a good start. Meanwhile, Mr. Short was in a sad dilemma, (although he had foreseen this, and rehearsed it long) between his warm frankness to his old friend, and his duty, and goodwill, to that one living in his own dear parish. But he settled aright, and against his own desire—which is one of the true tests of right decision—to leave the captain as dark as ever, in his own recess, and to stave off the colonel's curiosity about him. To the former, it might be matter of great moment; whereas it is very little loss to any man, to be robbed of a thing that he never uses, unless he has paid for it heavily—advice.

"You ought to begin at once, if you mean to do much good," said the vicar, looking round at the overhung lawn, and the trees moustached with moss, and fungus; "you are six weeks later, on this side of the moor, than we are at Christowell. But even here, not a day is to be lost, if you mean to do planting. My friend cannot possibly leave home now; and an accident has happened (a very sad affair, of which you will hear by-and-by) not on his threshold, but much worse—through the roof of his favourite vinery. I would not spoil your dinner, and some other little doings, by making your dear godchild anxious. And in reason, there need not be a shadow of anxiety, except for those wondrous doctors. Old Betty Sage, John Sage's Betty, would have put Dicky Touchwood on his pins in three days, with her simples, and careful diet. But our Dr. Perperaps, a truly fine practitioner, and a man of solid grounding, will scarcely get him out of hand, within three weeks, and may have to make three months of it."

"What has happened to poor Dicky then? And why is Julia not to know?" The colonel gave a short, quick puff of smoke, because he hated mystery.

"There is no mystery at all about it," replied Mr. Short, who had his own turn of temper, and knew every nerve of his old friend's mind; "Dicky Touchwood tumbled through the roof of a greenhouse, or vinery, or something—I don't understand their distinctions—and he cut his legs, or what he calls his legs, as much as such nonentities could well be cut. He came down, like a tipsy-cake stuck with splinters; and tipsy he was, unless they told me lies. But our place is not to jeer, but sympathize. I have not ventured into this short narrative, till now, because one can never tell, how anything will act upon another mind, or at any rate, a female one."

"Short, you are right. I have observed that, often. The women know best in the end, I believe; but you never can tell, how they know it. Julia is full of sense; wonderfully so, to my mind; she gets at almost anything, five minutes before I do; and she sticks to it too; and that proves that she is right. But between you, and me, and the bedpost, Short—as the old ladies say—I don't want Jack to have her. There could not be a better girl, in many ways of looking at her. But she must have her own way, although she gets it gently. Jack, on the other hand, is very easy-tempered; but turn him you cannot, when once he has made his mind up. His wife, when he is old enough to want one, which we never used to think of, when I was young, should be amiable, gentle, fond of

little jokes, and capable of making them when he wants them, well-bred, and totally indifferent about dress—the new fashions, I mean, and all that rubbish, that some women study, more than their own behaviour—also she ought to be diligent, and thrifty, tidy, and particular to keep him to his meal-times, an experienced judge of meat, and butter, full of understanding about doors, and windows, thoroughly warm-hearted, and not inclined to cough, when she smells tobacco-smoke."

"To think of such a wife, makes a man's mouth water," Mr. Short answered, with a serious look; "there used to be some of them; but the young women now think more of themselves, than of anything else. It is my place, to pay attention to the women—well, not in the way that you are smiling at, my friend—what I mean to say is——"

"Well done, Short!" cried the colonel, putting down his pipe, and laughing heartily; "well done, my dear fellow! To be sure it is. And you magnify your office. I shall tell my dear wife that."

"Now don't you be too clever; but just hear me out. A parson must attend to his women, not only for their own sake, but also to get at the men. You understand all about regiments, and that; but you never even heard perhaps of 'parish work.' It is almost a new idea, in the Church as yet; and I am not at all sure, that it will do much good, because it comes from the Dissenters, I believe. If we come to make a fuss of it, it will do a lot of harm, and make our flocks take it into their heads, that our object is to drive them. They like very much to be driven, by fellows they can turn out, as soon as they are tired of them; but they never will be driven by a gentleman; so that all these doings must be done with skill."

"I don't like to hear of such absurd inventions. When I was a boy, I knew a good deal of the clergy; and in Spain I came across some priests, who were very good and holy. But to come back to the women, Short—you understand them, do you?"

"No, I never said anything to that effect. Only that I have to study them; which is a different thing altogether. You were talking about Miss Touchwood, and the sort of wife your son should have. I know the very girl for him—such a beauty—and a first-rate gardener; as well as all that you require. But two people cannot be matched by pattern. I have made a lot of matrimony, fetching them up to it, when it was needful, and reading the bans, and going through with it; and unless there is very bad temper on both sides, they get on respectably afterwards. But I am talking horn-book."

"Horn-book ought to be talked much more, in the present wild

days," said the colonel. "Soon there will be nothing sacred. Every idiot laughs at institution. However, to come back to Julia. She is a very handsome girl; and Jack—well, I don't want her to be too much here. She came to us suddenly; I don't know why; but rather out of spirits, and I could not ask the reason. My dear wife, who might have got it out of her quite prettily, has been laid up all the while, with a very bad attack; but she told me, in confidence, that it ought to be a love-affair."

"Rather the contrary," answered the parson; "but as she has not told you, I will not. Her mother was unkind to her, to put it mildly. You know that 'my lady'—as she loves to be called—is sometimes very prompt of action. However, there are worse people in the world; and I trust that they are burning to be reconciled. I brought as good a message to Miss Touchwood, from her mother, as could be expected, considering their relation. Also I said, that poor Dicky wanted her; and she promised to go home to-morrow."

"Short, you are a public benefactor. Three cheers for the influence of the clergy. I shall be sorry to lose Julia, of course; but still I would rather lose her, than Jack. Young fellows, nowadays, think very little of the wisdom of their parents. But who is the girl, that he ought to have? I shall come, and see her, if she lives at Christowell."

"Time enough to think of that, my friend. No one admitted, except on business. You will have to send your card in, and write upon it, 'I want to see the young lady, Jack ought to have.' But what a hurry you are in, about him! He is only three-and-twenty, according to my reckoning. 'Let un 'baide,' as John Sage says, 'let un 'baide, till a' getteth a buzzum.' By-the-by, our John would suit you well, for laying out ground, or for seeing to your trees, or shaping out a new kitchen-garden. All flowers he despises, except cauliflowers. He says that the Lord made the flowers to grow wild, on purpose to vex Solomon; but Solomon, and the Lord together, couldn't grow cabbage, without manure—or 'mannering,' as he calls it. He knows the Old Testament, ten times as well as I do."

"Short, I will have him; if only for that. Such men are obstinate; but brave, and honest. I have seen lots of them, in the army, generally Scotchmen. No infidel Frenchman could stand before them. How much money will he want, a week?"

"Eight shillings is the proper thing at Christowell. But then they get pickings, that work it up to nine, and even ten, in harvest-time. But I am not at all sure, that he would go from home. Our people know, when they are well off."

"Let him come to me, for three months, and go home for the harvest. I will give him twelve shillings a week, and house-room. And if we get on together, he may settle here."

"Tell it not, on our side of the moor; and warn him, not to speak of it. Every solid head in our parish would be turned; but Sage can keep his own counsel. He shall come to you, by this day week; but only on a three months' lease, at the longest. Christowell will not be itself, without him; and if anything important comes to pass, we shall have to send for him, to pronounce upon it. I shall miss him in church, more than a big pewful; he nods at me always, when I say the right thing, and he taps on the floor, with his ground-ash stick."

"We will not rob you of such a hearer, Short," said the colonel, perceiving what a sacrifice he asked; "your church, and parish, shall enjoy him, on a Sunday. I told you that I had taken, from the Duchy, a lease of the sporting over some ten thousand acres, upon which there may be ten head of game, in a favourable season. But, at £10 a year, it is cheap enough, and I may improve it, if I can. It was done through my old friend, General Punk, who has interest with the steward, and who promised to come down, every year, if I would do it; and it is cheap enough to see an old friend, at that rent. And Jack was quite up for it, when I told him; for he likes to march forty miles a day, I do believe; which is all very well, when you choose for yourself your route, your weather, and your toggery. I intend to try red grouse there, as well as black. They do in bleaker places than Dartmoor even. It is not a new experiment—I know that. But experiments require luck, and perseverance, even more than skill, I do believe. At any rate, I mean to try it."

"You are a sanguine man," the vicar answered; "I wish that I could say so, of myself. But try it, my dear fellow; by all means, try it. But John Sage does not understand game-keeping."

"And I don't want him to understand it," returned the gallant colonel; "it is not like pheasant-hatching, or skilled work. You turn out your grouse, with their wings a little tipped, and you let them take their chance; that is my idea. Only they must not be harassed, just at first, until they learn their whereabouts; or off they go. And it must be done, at the right time of year, and according to the season. Some of my birds are turned out already. Another batch comes next week; and failing these, I shall try a lot of cheepers, in June, if I can get them. You know that I am not a strict game-preserver. I would never insist upon 'pheasants *v.*

peasants'—as the radical papers term it. But my little crotchet can breed no ill-will; for everybody about here is delighted with it; and it will put money in some honest fellow's pocket."

"But how will John Sage help, in this little scheme? He may be the wisest of mankind, as everybody knows, and especially himself—but he doesn't know a grouse from a game-cock, or at any rate, not a red one."

"So much the better. He will take more interest in the subject, from its novelty. But have no fear, Short, of my perverting your Solomon into a Nimrod. Nothing of the kind is in my thoughts. My grouse hobby only concerns him thus—I have made a little hut in the shelter of a tor—I think they call it Weist-tor, but I never know their tors—where a man may be comfortable, and put up his pony. I want an honest man to be there, every now and then; or to have it supposed, that he may be there. It is about half way, to your delightful parish; which seems to be the home of every virtue. Very well; Sage shall have the old grey pony, who knows every stone upon the moor, I do believe; and every Saturday, if he likes to do it, he shall set off for his native place, with a gallon of cider, and a bag of kitchen-victuals, to be his own master till Monday morning."

"It is well discovered, and it shall come true," Mr. Short answered, with a smile at thinking of the figure Sage would cut, and the importance he would show; "the old man understands the moors, as well as a pee-wit; and better than your red grouse will. But one thing you forget—the superstition of the race. Weist-tor is almost as awful, to the native mind, as Wistman's wood, or even Cranmere pool itself. If you gave John Sage £10 every time, he would not go there at night-fall."

"We will get over that, somehow, or other. Entrap him there once, and he will grow foolhardy. I can always make men go, where I want to send them. I have set my mind on this, because it will keep up regular communication between us. I shall send you butter, and grapes, when I get any; and you can send me, now and then, a comb of the honey, for which Christowell is famous. You get about half the rain, that we do, I believe. But what a time Manx is, with our coffee! I must go and rout him up, I do believe."

"Here comes our coffee; well-done, cup-bearer! The best, and the cleverest dog, in the world. No, not to me first; to the colonel first, because, though I am the visitor, you are my butler. That's right. Did you see, my dear fellow, how he balanced it?"

"Talk about reasoning powers!" said the colonel; "I never saw any man do it half so well. And this is your dog, *Nous*, then? I am not given to envy; but—my goodness—did you notice how he wagged his tail? He would not do it, till you took the cup, for fear of spilling. Well, I have seen the very best-bred footman laugh, at a joke of his betters (as they call themselves), and spoil a lady's dress, while she was putting in her cream. And they talk of these dogs having no mind, Short!"

"Not only does *Nous* understand plain English," answered Mr. Short, as the dog laid down the little butter tub, which had contained the cups, "but he knows what is passing in a man's mind, better, very often, than the man himself does. But women are a dreadful puzzle to him."

"So they ought to be; I admire him the more. Come here, and let me thank you, good dog, and clever one. Short, you are too sharp for me. I never even knew this dog was here. You arranged it all with Manx, as to what he was to do."

"Not a bit of it. I told the man, that he could wait at table; but he laughed at me; and thus is he discomfited. I told your stableman, when he knotted *Nous* up, that no knot known in the Royal Navy would hold the dog, more than two hours; but he laughed, and said that unless he bit the rope through, he was fast for ever. He never attempts to bite any rope now, because I smacked him for it, once; but he unties any knot, with nose, tongue, and foot."

"It has made your poor nose bleed, old doggie; show us what it is then? You mustn't be so clever." Colonel Westcombe loved dogs; and they always felt it.

"It must be something else. Upon my word, the wretch has hit him. Just a graze on the tip of his sensitive nose; and his labour at the knot has set it off."

Then the vicar, in hot indignation, poured forth his grievance against that low skulk with a gun, which he had not spoken of at dinner-time, for fear of spoiling cheerfulness. His host listened gravely, and was shocked at such low villainy; and said that he had heard of a desperate fellow, lurking in the depths of the moor, and killing sheep; and the moor-men were afraid of him, because he had a gun.

"Sooner, or later, we shall catch him," he continued; "I have heard of him, from our chief constable. He believes him to be a noted murderer; a fellow who has killed two women, in cold blood. Let us say no more about him. Do you see Julia? How noble

she looks, when her spirit is up! Master Jack has got more than he can do, to hold his own."

With the pair in the distance, who had no coffee, things were going on, even as he said. Jack Westcombe, although he had taken his degree, or perhaps for that reason, was shy with young ladies; of whom he knew little, having never a sister, to lead him amongst them, and describe their little tricks. Miss Touchwood knew this, and made the most of it.

"Do you mean to say, Mr. Westcombe," she went on; "that you mean to do nothing, and be nothing, in the world? It does seem such a waste of power, in these very earnest times."

"My great aunt was asking me about it the other day," said Jack, who had a dry way, when heavily attacked, of remitting his assailants to their own business; "and she has a right to ask, because she means to leave me something."

"Yes, to be sure; how good of her! She must have entered into the more recent spirit, the glorious development of mind, and matter. What a joy it is, to find that these high perceptions are penetrating, even to the passing generation! What an incentive to the younger mind! Did she propose any definite work, anything earnest, and advancing?"

"She did; an advance very definite indeed; but scarcely of a nature, perhaps, to interest young ladies. I will tell Lady Touchwood of it, when I come over."

"My mother takes very little interest in improvement. She seems to think it quite enough, to be no worse than we used to be."

"But your brother, Miss Touchwood; surely he may be developed, elevated, rendered progressive, and all that?"

"Unfortunately, my brother has no mind," she replied, with firm serenity; "but many people seem to like him all the better for it; particularly, I believe, at Cambridge. But you are very different. Your father has been telling me, how much he is afraid that you will be too intellectual."

"My father is the kindest-hearted man, in all the world. And since he came into this property, he thinks it his very first duty to be cheated, right and left; especially by his very intellectual son."

"How I admire this grand old place!" the young lady cried, as she sprang upon a bank of moss, besieged with primroses; "any one, who lives here, ought to be cheated; just to balance nature's gifts. Look, how the sunset warms, and deepens, the crimson of the bricks, and the grey granite facings, and the glitter of the ivy round the bows! And the grand old trees, full of mystery, and

honour; and the beautiful slope of the lawn, unbroken by patches of glaring ugly dazzle, and patterns of hideous stiffness; and the murmur of the brook, like a soft strain of music, coming through the joyful buds of spring. Oh, how I wish our place was like this!"

"I have never been at Touchwood Park," said Jack, looking slyly at his beautiful companion, whose colour was heightened, and figure set forth, by excitement; "but from all, that I hear, it is a brilliant place, one of the highest developments of the age. This is a very old, humdrum, benighted, obsolete product of the darker ages. I am sure, you would never like to live here."

"Wouldn't I? If I only had the chance!" Then Julia blushed deeply, as her eyes met his; and even Jack's cheeks, which were always ruddy, showed sympathy with the sunset, as the fair one turned away.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SMALL COMMISSION.

UPON the dreary moor, there is little pleasure of spring, or joy of summer, because of the absence of that beauty (transcending the loveliest daughter of mankind), the excellent beauty of the trees; which man was meant to nourish, but loves better to demolish.

Only in the softer wrinkles, where the hard face of the land relaxes into a smile aside, has any tree a hope of standing, against the fierce wind, and scowling sky. But in the few spots, where shelter helps them, and frugal virtue of the soil gives food, the pleasure of surprise multiplies their beauty; and the jagged granite sets their green off, with a spiked white chain around their necks. These quiet dingles are the very sweetest places, for any man to wander through, with the spring of the year around him, and the sound of crispness following his steps, and plenty of time to see things grow.

When the smiting wind, from the wilderness, leaps over the bristly ramp of furze, and after a few dying kicks, expires; the soft kind creatures, that have finer feelings, rejoice down below, and hug themselves. For here, they have safety, and comfort, and repose, and a soil glad with sweet oozyness; and the sprinkle of tempestuous air ruffles through them peacefully, and the hushing of the wind is music.

In such a gentle place, set largely with promiscuous hope, and strewn with more than good intentions of the modest work of spring, the foot of a savage man crushed the moss, and a tumult, harsher than that of the wildest wind, stirred through the branches. Forsaken of all his fellows' love, and disdainful of his Maker's, as wild a man as ever trod the earth; because he had no love of anything. Even as a baby of low nature may be known, by its cruel look at a little bird, or fly, and a boy of nasty instincts, by his torture of a frog; so a thoroughly hard man shows himself, by doing despite to the goodwill of his mother earth.

This man came along, with a fierce glitter in his eyes, and a slouching of his lumpy neck, and scorn of men stamped upon his bulky forehead, gingery brows, and grimy cheeks. The shape of his face had once been fine, the features strong, and regular; and a mighty strength of will had made it, in the prosperous days, impressive. But no one would think of considering it now, as a matter of kind interest; the impulse, of any one beholding it, would be to prefer the other side of Dartmoor.

The man, who was tall, and of vigorous frame, contrived to crush everything that could be crushed by one pair of feet, planted recklessly. His coat was of undressed sheepskin, with the wool torn, and worn, by the briars, and rocks; his breeches were of rickcloth, sewn roughly by himself; his cap of badger-skin; and about him there was nothing of tradesman's work, except his boots. These had been stolen, from a shop, or cart, or perhaps from some gentleman's dwelling-house; for clearly enough, they were boots of good art, flexible, shapely, strong, and lively, and really inclined to be waterproof, on the feet of a clever wearer. They had a very clever wearer now, who, instead of cracking them with blacking, anointed them daily with raw fat, which they sucked into their constitution.

There were many who desired to catch this man, for a heavy reward was upon him; but any one, looking at him, would think twice, before raising hand, to lay hold of him. For he carried a big double-barrelled gun, of heavy bore, not too long to be handy, and having percussion locks, a novelty as yet among the simple sportsmen of the moor. Wild, and savage, and reckless as he looked, with the stain of the bogs, and the fray of the rocks, and ravellings of time, and weather; it was manifest, that he set store by his gun, which was clean, well-oiled, and in good condition. Even now, fiercely as he trod his way, among delicate growth, frail bud, and gentle flower, he bore his heavy weapon carefully, an

watchfully, lest any bough should bruise, or sharp rock scratch it. Also he kept his keen eyes on the strain, for he was going to a doubtful, and a perilous appointment.

"If he has doubled on me, he dies first," was the comfort he kept on administering to himself, although it did not make him comfortable; "he would turn upon himself, if he were paid, and could run away from it. There are many blackguards in the world; but none fit to hold a candle, to my clever, and exalted friend. He has thriven, and I have failed; because I had scruples, and he had none. But I have one pull upon him—his life is much to him; mine is a very small thing to me."

In the bend of this glen, where the wood grows thickest, there is a little driblet of a spring, that falls—by way of an early lesson to itself—almost as soon as it has done rising, over a rib of its hard mother granite. Cheerfully a few things fond of water come to alleviate its first mishap—moss for instance, and the stems of wet-bine, and crinkled caddis reeds, that introduce themselves, as conduits. Still there the fall is, and it must be fallen, even though it be five bad yards deep, amid a little jubilee of fluttering expectants, flower and leaf, and crocketed frond, jerk-tailed gnat, and snub-nosed fernweb, the little mouse that lives in a gossamer almost, and the rabbit who builds him a castle of sand—all of them rejoicing in the tiny spout of crystal, the jeopardy of a sprinkle, from a whiff of wind across it, and the freshness of the seed-pearls, that glisten in the sunshine, or make a sliding string of some long flower-stem they have stolen.

Upon a slab of granite, near a stool of budding hazel, where the clear little thread of water frayed itself into a fantastic knot, at the base of the crag that shaped it, there sat a man of impatient mind, high colour, and strong character. Not such character, perhaps, as those who aim at the welfare of the human race would desire to increase, and multiply; but such as many positive moralists prefer to what they call "the washed out type of persons, without any will of their own." In a word, here was the red-faced man.

The style of courteous bluffness, and of pleasant arrogance, which liked him well, and made clever women hate him so, was not at all the cue to suit him now. For now he had to deal, with a man that knew him, and felt for him even less respect, than he still was able to nourish for himself. On this account, George Gaston allowed himself to look as nearly as possible the animal he was—an ill-bred, ill-conditioned man; who had chosen the evil, rather than the good; and despised the good, because he never could regain it.

Guy Wenlow, the murderer of two women—if verdicts could be trusted—and now the outcast of the moor, was forcing his overhung, and tangled way, to the place of appointment, with such a reckless noise; partly through ferocity, and partly of set purpose. For he wanted to show that he was not afraid of any one, but could roam where he pleased, like a gentleman at large.

Generally, when two big villains meet, for concoction of further villainy, one of them takes the upper hand, and keeps it, in virtue—if the word may so be used—of more skilful, and masterful villainy. This was what Gaston intended to do; and Wenlow was equally resolved to do it. But a man who has dwelt in the desert for a twelvemonth, and mainly been dealing with the larger forms of nature, lies at a sad disadvantage before his fellow, who has never missed a day, in the factory, and mart of lies.

George Gaston smiled at his former comrade, as he broke from the covert into the rugged opening, with his gun at full-cock, and eyes flashing defiance. "Did you think that I would harm you?" he asked rather sadly; "is there no confidence, among old friends?"

"Talk no rubbish," the old friend replied; "if you could gain sixpence by hanging me, and keep your own body out of it, you would do it. What do you want with me? My time is short."

"Your time will be shorter, if you so misuse it. You are soured by retirement, instead of growing mellow. I am disappointed, by your want of cordiality."

The man of the sheepskins turned away with an oath, and threw his gun on his shoulder. "I came a long way to oblige you," he said; "Good-bye! You will swing before I do."

"Civilization has no sweets for him. There was a time, when he loved potted char. But now he cares only for Dartmoor mutton."

"Gaston," cried the other, coming back with dignity, and yet with some signs of desire about his mouth, "is it potted char? What a memory you have! If you only knew, how sick I am of mutton!"

"It is potted char, from the only house possessing any connection with the genuine fish. The brand is on the top, and the bottom, and the sides, and especially over the place to put the knife in; because of the sad increase of commercial roguery. The smell alone will indicate how genuine it is. A 3 lb. pot, for old lang syne. But alas, there is no true friendship left!"

"How many pots of it have you brought? This is truly kind, on your part, George. No one has shown a bit of care about my

likings, ever since every one turned against me. But what is it you want of me, in return for all this bribery?"

"Only a little thing, Guy Wenlow; a trifle altogether, for a man of your position. I am half ashamed to give you such a trumpery commission. But it may lead to better things for both of us, hereafter."

"No mealy mouth about it, George. I care very little what I do now."

"Well, this is a thing that you will like to do. You hate any fellow that sticks up to be a wonder?"

"That I do, with all my heart. It is humbug, rank humbug. We are all alike. You know it, as well as I do."

"Never mind moralizing now. Do you remember a tale I told you, that night when the lightning was so frightful on the heath?"

"Every word of it," answered the other, with a laugh; "for it let me into a little secret, that even George Gaston was afraid of something. 'Let us talk of something good,' you said, 'the weather is so awful; let us talk of something good.' Fie, George, fie, to be a coward of a thunder-cloud!"

"If you had seen what I have, ay and felt it too, you would sing another song, Guy Wenlow. Some men attract it, some repel. Twice have I been struck; and the colour of my face—but never mind now—it never thunders here."

"That shows your ignorance of the moor. You should hear it rattle round the tors, sometimes. But what am I to do for you? And how much for it?"

"All you have to do for me, is to knock down a small boy. And for that you shall have £5 in gold. Unless you like to do it, from good feeling only. For what chance can you get of spending any money?"

"Gaston, you always were a despicable screw. To knock down a boy, costs five shillings, and expenses. For £5, twenty boys should be knocked down; and you are not the man to pay too much. What you want, is a bigger job than that. Out with it!"

"Well, if you want a big name for it, and small crimes do not suit you, Guy, you may call it the robbery of Her Majesty's mail, as represented by a cobbler's boy. The man of whom I told you that fine story, a cock-a-hoop, a highflyer, a romantic fool of honour——"

"You called him none of that, George Gaston, when the lightning was around you. He was a marvel of good works then; and to praise him seemed to protect you in your trembles."

"Pest upon you! I was nervous, I confess. Every one has his weak point, I suppose. What he may be, is no concern of yours. All you have to do, is to look after him for me. And if you do it well, you shall have handsome pay. Even in the wilderness, you want money. Without it, you would have been taken long ago. And, to break into farm-houses, is but onions and bacon. A little healthy business, on the outskirts of the moor, will cure you of bog ague, and put cash in your woolly pockets. Wenlow, I congratulate you, on your brave appearance."

"Any fool can laugh. You are wasting time. I cannot. My day is divided; and I never knew the value of time, till I had to score it by the shadows."

"And to keep on the shadowy side of the score. Impatient man, I will be brief. Have you ever heard of Christowell?"

"Yes, I know all about it. I have got an eye to the parson's house. You may hear of something I do there."

"Try nothing of the kind. It is a very quiet hole, and must be treated quietly. Under the beacon, lives our friend, who made such a fool of himself years back. There he has got a sort of hut, and garden—a craze, a bit of madness, suited to his strange propensities. He was knocked on the head, in some battle, I believe; and the earth went in upon his brain, and stayed there. He is cracked about gardening, and the things the worms do. He pounds away, and labours with his naked arms, as if he had been born in a brick-field. I saw him myself, or I could not have believed it. I was let in, by a man who knows every rat-hole of the premises. The fellow was a mass of mould, and grime, when he might have been rolling in guineas."

"I like a man of that sort. He cannot be a sneak," Black Wenlow replied, with a look that meant, 'like you, my friend.' "It will take more than £5, to make me go against him."

"What a sentimental turn that is! Such a lesson in morality is worth £5. A man is enabled to charge for his work, according to his character; £10 will be very handsome, for a man of yours. You know the man I mean, from my description. The chaw-bacons call him 'Captain Larks.' I have no time to tell you, how I am concerned with his affairs; and if I had, it would do no good. The practical part of the matter is, that I want to keep him as he is—retired, industrious, respectable, and wholly in the dark about his family affairs. He has quitted the world, of his own accord; he is as happy as a king; and I wish him to continue so. His return to civilized life would be a plague to me, as well as misery to himself.

I wish him well, with all my heart; for I always liked a magnanimous fool, a boy who sees the world through his own pea-shooter. Perhaps he has never even heard of me; for I have arisen since his day."

"I have no time to hearken to all these items. I have to watch the shadows, as a painter does. Tell me what I have to do; and never mind the reasons."

"All you have to do is, to keep watch upon the man. He must not go from home, without my hearing of it, by a letter through the old rogue at the *Raven*. And another thing, still more important, is that he must not receive any letters. I shall leave Exeter, by the *Quicksilver*, this evening, having discovered all I want to know at present. On Monday, the lawyers of the family will write to him, having at last found him out, through me, after a score of advertisements had failed. That letter will be due to me; and I must have it. It must go through the post, and bear the proper post-marks; but instead of being delivered to Captain Larks, it must be handed over to your humble servant."

"And you wanted me to rob the mail for £5! Many things amaze me in your nature; but one thing astounds me—your quantity of brass."

"Cheek is now the word for it, since your disappearance from polite society. But the name is bigger than the job, Guy Wenlow. To-morrow will be the first of May. On Wednesday morning, the letter will come to Christowell, about ten o'clock as usual, and be left at the house of James Trickey, the cobbler. A new postage 'envelope,' some new-fangled crotchet for cheap letters, is to be in use upon the first of May; with the postage paid, or some such stuff. All Christowell will be goggle-eyed, for a long time after these come to hand. I shall send two dozen dummies to people, whose names I have picked up. Trickey will be mazed, as they call it about here, and attribute all these wonders to the Pixies, and the witches. He won't venture out of sight of his own door, that day; especially at such a time of year, when the evil spirits do their worst. His little boy Bob, who is too young to be afraid, will be sent up the hill with the captain's letter. Scare him to the point of death; but don't hurt him."

"You need not tell me that; I am benevolence itself. Very well, I take his letter; and what then? On the moor are no post-offices."

"But the man at the *Raven* can be trusted. He makes a good thing out of you. For any pretty bit of skill, a noble door is opened by all this new nonsense about cheap letters, and paying

for their carriage beforehand. When there was eightpence to pay, it could be shown whether anybody paid the eightpence; but who will know now, what becomes of a letter, when the interest of the post-office is to take the dirty penny, and have no more bother with it? Such a plan may last a month perhaps; and throughout that month, will be a muddle. All that I have foreseen; and timed your little plan accordingly. A hideous thing, called an 'envelope'—because there is no English name for it—will contain this letter for Captain Larks. All you have to do, is to take it from the boy, go to the *Raven* the same night with it, before any fuss arises, find my instructions, and follow them."

"That is all very simple, and a credit to you, Gaston. But excuse my anxiety about the cash. The sum is a small one; but the times are bad with me. These miserly clod-hoppers smuggle off their money to a bank, instead of their bolster, or the thatch. For a month, I have not known where to turn, for a bit of honest plunder. Even the *Raven* begins to look askew at me."

"That shall be righted; and you must not be too active now, except upon my business. You have your head-quarters, the Lord knows where, in the depth of this horrible wilderness. The man of the *Raven* is a very decent fellow, and would sell his good old wife, for a fair consideration. The moor is delightful, at this time of year, and the air ecstatically bracing. Stock yourself well, to the extent of a sovereign (which I will leave with mine host on account), spend a few days healthfully, in the boggiest quarters of your beat, enjoy my potted char, and some very choice pig-tail, which I will leave for you—a perfect charm for all aches, and agues—and then, on Wednesday morning, earn your balance, repair to the trysting-place, and get it."

"You go on so fast, when you want to slur a point. Slow and sure is my style of business. Am I to look for you, at that filthy hole, on Wednesday?"

"Is there no meaning in the English language? I said that you then would find my instructions, and according to them, send back the letter. After that, your care of Captain Larks begins. Lest haply he should hear of things, from any other quarter, which it is his hearty desire, and truest interest, not to know. Having hit upon a clue to him, some half year ago, I have employed some nicety in placing all advertisements, or at least in suggesting the quarter for them, so that none of them should hit him. But now I make a clean breast to the men of law, who have a perfectly just faith in me. By vast exertions, I have found the man. They will

write to him, after much sage counsel, a letter for which they will charge two guineas, though it is to go two hundred miles, for one penny. For another penny, it comes back to them. Wonderful is the insolence of this age. How happy are you, who live out of it! Steam-coaches are beginning to run madly all about. Next year they are to come to Bristol. They are taking everybody's land, without his leave. That has something to do with the urgency of this matter. It outrages all one's sense of justice. But, thank heaven, there are still some people, who know what is right, and stick to it!"

"And foremost of them all, George Gaston. Very well, I know what you want, and will carry it out most faithfully. Where will the tobacco be? I want that first. If you knew what stuff I am obliged to smoke——"

"You shall have it to-night, with your outfit, at the *Raven*. Lay aside, once and for all, your most narrow idea, that I stint anything. Of all men, I am the most liberal, when it pays."

"To me, you should be more than liberal, George. Whose doing is it, that I lead this life? Who first led me, to despise my home, to want to be more than I was meant for, to gamble away my poor father's savings, to rob my sister, to break my mother's heart——"

"Guy Wenlow, this tenderness is not thrown away on me. It proves that your heart is in the right place still; though it may have sadly roamed away from it. But we must not linger. The whole world is in a hurry. Nobody looks back; everybody forward. Repentance, and remorse, are a pair of old samplers. The *Quicksilver* average is fourteen miles an hour; and the horses must be changed, in thirty seconds, to show that they can beat steam-coaches. When you were a sporting character, Guy Wenlow, with £50 on each side of your stomach, how you would have loved to sit behind those horses! But they summon me; I seem to hear them neigh."

The better of the two men turned away, to hide the tear which the memory of his mother, or perhaps of the horses, had called forth. Then he swung his heavy gun, upon his shoulder, and made off. "One little trifle I forgot to mention," the other shouted after him, "a thing that will make you stick the closer to your duty. The captain's daughter is the loveliest girl, that can be found, even in Devonshire. You are an admirer of the sex. *Verbum sap.*"

"We are told, that the devil lives on Dartmoor," cried the outcast; "but now he means to come to and fro, by the *Quicksilver*."

"Go thy way. The fool, and the woman, have privilege of last

word," Gaston muttered. Then putting away a pistol, which had been hidden near his fingers, he discharged into his mouth a more peaceful instrument, known among travellers by the same name. With his high colour heightened, he arose, and left the dell; whose beauty was not impaired by his departure.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DANCING TREE.

AMONG the few places that now keep shops, on the threadbare skirt of Dartmoor, one of the kindest, and most tranquil-minded, is that little town, Moreton Hampstead.

In a Devonshire town, as a general rule, the most energetic inhabitant may be looked for—if any one is rude enough to want him—first near the tap of his favourite inn; then about the reading-room, or post-office; after that, clearly at the farrier's shop; and for the rest of the day, on the bridge, with a pipe in his mouth, and hands in pocket.

The great defect of Moreton is therefore this, that it owns no bridge of any kind, for such transcendent uses. But in plea of that, it may well be urged (if any man there can be urgent) first that if any bridge were needed, no one could ever find the energy to build it; and next that no genuine Moreton man would go forth to a bridge, for his lounge, while he can get it, right happily, on his own window-ledge. If ever he is wanted, which very seldom happens, there he may be found, during those short periods, when he is not feeding, or profoundly asleep. Now as to those two *alibis*, the former is strictly sacred. The shop-door is bolted, and the bell unhung; and from twelve o'clock, till two, the only business considered, is the commerce of the interior. Then if anybody, scanty of good manners, thumps upon the door, why just let him thump again. With a relish, as of pickles, or of very cool cucumber, the hearty tradesman smacks his lips, and labours at the self-help most congenial to him,—a large help of very lofty order of mutton. If, at two o'clock, he unbolts his door, and rehangs his bell, he may be taken at the moment, and goaded into a shout to his wife, to know the price of something, now hanging in his window. However, if his wife makes no reply—as generally happens, for she is of his own race—he will ask the brisk customer, how much he has been

in the habit of giving for the article. If the customer forgets, or prefers not to tell, because he expects to get it cheaper here, the worthy shopkeeper talks about invoices, which he cannot lay his hand upon just now, but will do so at his earliest leisure, and the gentleman may take it, and come, and know the price to-morrow. Then he retires for his afternoon nap, having done a striking stroke of business.

Nevertheless, there are two people often wide-awake at Moreton. One is the boy, with two buckets, and a mop, who invades the gentle streets, soon after breakfast, and stirs the narrow echoes with his constant cry—"Wash yer winders for 'ee!" As nobody ever washes his own windows, and the wind asserts its hereditary, and perhaps etymologic, right to invest every window with a coat of granite grime, this boy has got to move both arms at once, and becomes a pleasant sight, for those who never do so.

Or rather, those who do so, only when they are a-dancing. Because of so being asleep all day, and having no bridge to yawn upon, Moreton is—or was, until a railway rushed into its bottom—"the chiefest place for dancing, to be found in merry Devonsheer." While a man slumbers sweetly, against the partition, that severs his nice little parlour from his shop (it is needless to say, upon which side he is) another man, knowing the trick of the door, runs in (though nothing else could ever make him run) and handling him by the head, against the wall, pulsatively, stirs up the muffled drum of his outer ear, by blowing down the conch of his outer palm into it—"Ball to-night! Zax o'clock." "How much be tickutts?" asks the firm reposer, with a rub of his eyes, and a tingle in his head. "Zaxpince aich—dree vor a zhillun." Then he feels in the fork of his clothes, and pays a shilling.

This is the other man, who keeps on moving, and whips round the corners, quicker than a window can go up. He gets up the dances, and he knows the way to do it, calling on the ladies first, and putting clearly to them, that all the gentlemen in the place are wild, about getting them to come, but on no account would trouble them to come, except just as they are. Nothing in the way of dress could make them look better than they do now; and he chins up his fiddle, and touches two strings. Every lady looks demure, and says that she really dislikes dancing, and did hope to have heard the last of it. But rather than disappoint her neighbours, she will take one ticket. Then he twangs again; and with an eye to strict economy, she takes half a dozen.

Behold how unjust a thing it is to attempt to be too accurate!

There is another active man in Moreton Hampstead, and his name is Timothy Pugsley. Happily for the town, which never could endure three moving spirits, the greater part of his time goes away, among the lanes, and across the hills. When he comes home at night, with Teddy, the two of them want stable. They are stiff about their joints, and say to themselves, and to one another, that they would go ten miles more, if needful, but can see no more to do to-day, except victuals; and are glad of it. Teddy has a mash, with hay to follow, and oats enough to dream of; and Timothy has a pan of fried potatoes, browning on the fire, with a plate turned over them, and bacon making little pops around the plate's edges, and jumping up at every pop, in a hurry to be tasted.

Timothy feels, as well as smells, after twelve hours on the moor, this joy; and he thanks the Lord, to find a warm house round him, a safe deliverance from robbers, storm, and accident, an uncommonly sharp appetite, with victuals fit to sharpen it, and a wife, who keeps his house in order, and can fry potatoes.

Yet, the most lively, and dissipated being, in all the town of Moreton, is neither the window-washing boy, nor the impetuous Chorægus, nor even Timothy Pugsley; but a tree, of great weight, and very prominent position, and old enough to know better. Whether its lineage is from one that danced to the lyre of Orpheus, or whether any Dryad with a tripping foot possesses it,—at any rate, this is the dancing tree. For many years now, it has left off dancing, even if it ever did begin, and has to be contented with the legal truth—"who does through another, does the thing himself." And to make sure, it does it through a great many others.

Especially, on the first of May, when the festival of Pales—as the learned tell us—is well observed by Christians. Instead of putting up a May-pole then, and frolicking around it, in a Pixy ring, the young folk of Moreton have their frisks among the verdure, without dread of dewy feet, or toes stuck in a mole-hill. High up in the tree, which stands in an elbow of scraggy street, they hoist, and fix a timber platform, strong enough to bear the vehemence of feet, not too aerial. The boughs of the patulous tree, above the bole, afford a noble amplitude; and a double ring of hay-rope, roven fast around the branches, provides the most headlong couple with a chance of preserving their necks, when valuable.

"Missy, you'm looking crule weist, and peaky," said Master Pugsley to Miss Arthur, when he was come with another load of pots, towards the end of April; "rackon, that Dicky Touchwood be a' plaguing on 'e. I knows what it be, my own son, Missy; my

good Missus, forgive me for the zame! Never could I zee a purty wench, when I were young, wi'out longing to make up to her. Excoose of me, Missy, if too free of spache. I only tarks what coometh natteral. To my rank of laife, and conzeiderin' the difference. And you knows it too, by the colour on your chakes."

"Mr. Pugsley, you should mind your own business. Your business is to deliver 144 pots, without any cracks in them."

"Bless 'e, Miss Rose, and I have doed it. They little sniggers is what cometh in the baking. Never yet sot I down a deliverance more claner. But you was a very little one, when first I knowed you, and growing bigger every spare-time, wi'out conzeiderin' of it. Why you used to make nort of kissing me, and never ax wuther no pots was cracked! But the chillers grow'th up, Miss, by will of the Lord, and doeth, like their veythers, and their moothers doed avore them. And it coom across my maind, Miss, by rasin of the dancing-time, that you was to be warneded of being a young 'ooman now, and no moother to look arter 'e. My waife zaith to me, afore prim taime of slumbering—'no moother, Tim, to look arter her; and the cappen no better than a hanvil-smiter; her wanteth a light hand; Tim, you do it.' Zumtaimes, my waife gooeth wrong about men's business, or consarning of me, or even of my datters, when they don't desarve it; but never in her judgment of the gentry, Miss."

"I am very much obliged, I am sure, to anybody, who wishes to be kind to me, and fancies that I want it. But none of you seem to understand, that I have nothing to complain of. I have heard enough, of what ladies do, from a young lady, who is here, staying in our house; and if nobody wanted pity more than I do, the world would be very happy, Mr. Pugsley."

"Zo 'un be," replied the carrier stoutly. "I zung a zong, all the way from Marton, 's marning; and a' can zing a zong, wi' ony of the gallery. But I likes to see the young volk a dancing too. The Lard hath made it natteral to 'un. And when I zeed your little voot, a' comin' from your pettygoat, I said to myzell, what a dancer her would make! Do 'e come, and zee our May-dancing, that's a dearie."

"I dare say, your May-dance is very pretty, or at any rate very queer," said Rose; "but it is not a fit place for ladies, I'm afraid. How can you keep rough people out?"

"If any man offendeth, in zider, ale, or langowich," the carrier answered austerely; "us kicketh 'un out o' the tree, wi'out no rasoning, and a' cometh down zober, on the backside of his head. Never has no call to do it twice, Miss. 'Twud do 'e good to zee

un ; and our upstair windy looketh down into the thick of it, like a bird's nestie. Wull 'e coom, if Cappen be agrayable thereto?"

Rose laughed at the idea that her father would consent, and cheerfully promised to go, if he should do so. Then Master Pugsley, in a bold yet crafty manner, made approaches to the captain ; and if truth ever did admit ductile, or elastic, fibre into the close grain of her heart, the carrier found out how to make her, "wi'out telling no lies"—as he himself acknowledged.

In this way it was settled then, that Mistress Pugsley (who could drive, as well as her husband—and her husband as well, according to some folk, whose business it was none of) should come in the Sunday-shay, at one o'clock on Monday, and put up the horse (who was to be borrowed, from a man who owed a bill of two years' standing) and dine in the kitchen, with Moggy the maid; though the captain said no ; but Tim Pugsley was firm, that his wife should not sit to a red-legged table, and the life he would lead with her afterwards. "Her could do up all the chany, and the zilver, like a looking-glass ;" he said, for fear of having seemed to go against her dignity.

Then, about three o'clock, they were to start, in the Sunday-shay borrowed from the *White Hart Inn;* and so (inasmuch as it would be absurd to spare a horse belonging to a man who owed him money) they might get to Moreton very well, by half-past four, and show Miss the shops, and the Punch and Judy, and wise pig, come from Exeter.

Nothing can ever hope to be done now, according to its calculation ; because of the many other things, all equally busy, that come in the way of it. But forty years ago, the rush was scarcely half-begun yet; and there still was time to live in. Mrs. Pugsley came, with the light shay, and the pony, who could properly afford to be thrashed, because his master could not pay. And Rose, although her mind might be considered rather large, was unable to help getting into high spirits, at the little change, and bit of fun, in front of her. But another, and a far more important person, was grieved, and sore wounded at heart, by such an outbreak.

"Then, am I to be left to myself all the day, while you go to see the chaw-bacons capering?" Dicky Touchwood asked, when he heard of what was toward ; and his voice was rich with a melancholy sound.

"You must not be left alone, because you are never any company to yourself," his fair attendant answered, in the kindest manner ;

"but that has been provided for, before this was thought of. Miss Perperaps has promised to come up, and sit with you, and read you a story-book, until you go to sleep. And I am to be home again, by one o'clock to-morrow; you will scarcely even know, that I have been away at all. And perhaps, I shall be able to make you laugh. I never saw anybody laugh like you. I am only afraid that it is bad for you."

"Do I laugh? Then I am sure I never mean it. It is all Spotty's fault; because she never cares for anything. I don't like young ladies of that character at all."

"You must never say that. It sounds ungrateful. If Miss Perperaps had been your own sister, she could not have done more for you."

"That makes it all the worse, and drives me wild. Why should people I don't care for, do me all the good that gets done for me; and the really nice ones take no notice? And they never seem to know, how it urges me!"

"Mr. Touchwood, it seems to me that you should rather ask, why you don't care for the people that are kind to you, and do all the good, that would not get done for you, unless you had them to do it."

"Very well. I dare say you think me ungrateful. But I am put out, because I shall not see you, very likely for two whole days. And the only pleasure I get now, is to look at you, Miss Arthur."

"Good-bye. Your dear mamma will be here at three o'clock; and I hope that she will say you are a good deal better. It is most unlucky, that whenever she comes, you should happen to fall back so, and be so languid, and low-spirited. It makes Lady Touchwood disbelieve the doctor; and she goes away, with such a sigh. Even if you feel worse than usual, you should try to put a cheerful face on; and especially to-day, when your sister is coming, for the first time, to see you. I am sure that you can walk very nicely, if you try."

"You never seem to enter into my case at all," Dicky Touchwood complained, as she passed out of hearing; "I don't want to go away. I like the place; I like the captain; I like the apple-fritters; and somebody even better still. In fact, I like everything, except the medicines. And if they would only allow me the right thing in malt, I'll be blest, if I'd ever get well again."

But his lovely young hostess, with all her good nature, was getting rather tired of his vapours, and vagaries. Her main delight was to be with her father, to help him, and hand him his

needs, and be ready with a smile (when that was one of them) and be able, at supper-time, to tell him how much he had done, if he dared to reproach himself. But ever since this boy tumbled in among them, instead of looking after her vines and roses, she must give up her time to be looked at by him. And this made her glad, to get away to Moreton.

Timothy Pugsley's "little 'ouze"—as he called his most highly respectable dwelling—was as full of deep corners, and heavy overhangings, and loopings, and humpings, and jags, and juttings, as the loftiest artist could desire to find, on a tour, or upon a friend's property. We take, at the present moment, deep interest in our forefathers; because they were so ignorant, in comparison with ourselves; and we doubt their *differentia*—as it used to be called, and used to be settled, before all wisdom went to flux. But if anything can be inferred about them (where all is inference, deference none), it seems to be, that they were fond of corners. They loved a deep corner; as we love a flat, whether vertical, or horizontal; and they liked to have shadow, as much as we hate it.

The carrier's house went up and down, and in and out, almost as freely as his cart did on the roads; and the roof carried fodder enough for a horse, as Teddy observed, with a watering mouth. No climbers were wanted, to cluster the windows, for the droopers clothed them amply—creeping Jenny, and run-away Jack, and the many forms of house-leek, with golden moss to brighten them. No rakes came near them, neither besom of destruction; their only enemy was the wind; and that they passed on into the chimney-pots.

"Now, if you plaize, Miss, this cornder hath been claned for e'," said Master Pugsley to Miss Arthur, after a magnificent tea downstairs. "'Tis the very place in all Marton town, for spyin' of they ranties. And wi'out you putts your head var vorth, ne'er a wan of 'em can see 'e. Viddles be toonin' up, a'ready. Many is the time, I've a' doed it, with the best of 'em. Zumtimes I wush I wor a lad again, and no vam'ly. Don't 'e tell that to my Missus, though."

"I've aheered 'e," said Mrs. Pugsley, panting up the creaky stairs, for she was fat exceedingly; "I've aheered 'e, Tim; and I be 'sheamed of 'e. Lor, Miss Rose, when my Timmy wor a buy, you could have put your two hands round him, what with his chronicles, and his asterisks! Nobody said a' wud ever grow up; but a' did; and a' wanteth to do so again, wi'out no waife to do's vittles for 'un."

"You've dooed your own too," said the carrier with a smile.

"How well her look'th, Miss Rosie, and chakes so bright as your'n a'most!"

"By rason I gotten a good man to keep me. Now Missy, shall I stop with you, and tell 'e who the volk be; or wad 'e zoonder baide aloun? Tim must be off, adoin' of a zaight of things. Nort can be done in this here town, wi'out Tim Pugsley."

"Oh, please to stop with me," said Rose; "I should never know anything about it—and indeed I would not stop, to shut you out from your own window. And Sally, and Milly, and Billy, must come. Why, what are they going to do already? The sunset is on the church-tower still, and the moon is as pale as an oyster-shell; but they mean to begin—I declare they do!"

They meant to begin, and more than that, they did begin without delay, and with strong intention to go on. For the girls there was a tallat ladder, to be mounted, according to their manifold natures; some making a great fuss (for fear of falling, without being noticed), some skipping up shyly, before any one could think of them, some ascending slowly, with a gaze of large unconsciousness; and others smiling, with their skirts tucked in, to prove what management can do. The lads, upon the other hand, had too much of their own to do, to be over-nice in criticism. Their only way up to the dancing-stage was a half-inch rope, hanging down from a bough, and anointed well with mutton-suet. Also, at the landing-place, where an active lad might stick his heels in, invidious fellows, who had climbed already, and wished to keep the platform to themselves, showed a narrow-minded tendency to push away any better-looking lad, who was aspiring to the girls. And a combat ensued, which was pleasant to behold.

"They've been, and gotten our best stable lantern!" Mrs. Pugsley cried indignantly. "Fie upon Tim, they get over him so! One of them scrapers scrapeth with a book. Some saith 'tis larnin,' and some saith 'tis hignorance. Girt hignorance, to my mind, for to viddle wi' a copy-book. There they gooth—fust couple right, and turn once! Zim'th no more nor yesterday, as I wur doin' of it. Vaive and thirty years agone, Miss; and us used to cry 'Boney' for the gals to shake to; and if you said it now, they would stare, and ax the manin'."

"But they seem to shake very well, without it, Mrs. Pugsley. How wonderfully they go in and out! I never saw anything half so pretty. And how beautifully they keep time; though they seem to be laughing, instead of being serious! I have seen a ball of very high society at Exeter, just that I might know how to under-

stand it, through the cracks of the door, and from the cock loft but it frightened me so sadly to look at them; because they seemed to dance one step, and frown two."

"The karlity knows what is best for 'em, Miss"—Mrs. Pugsley had been cook in a very good family, and never meant to sink the difference,—"but our lads, and wenches, if soever they comes cross-ways, with royal authority, and the viddles going twang, and the moon a' shaining bright, and a man like Tim, and a 'ooman like me, looking on agin' all unpropriety, they sayeth to themselves, and to wan anither—'us may carry on now, and spake the word that cometh upward.' And then they goo'th on, for more nor thiccy."

"Whatever they are thinking of, they look very nice, and they do it very well, and their manners are so good! Why, they bow to one another continually!"

"Not they, Miss; never a one of them. 'Tis the branches makes them duck their heads, for fear of an orkard clout on 'em. Good manners coom'th convanient so."

Whatever their manners were, they enjoyed them, and with nature's help looked well. For the large moon began to come loftily into the middle of their doings, and to make them clear. The maidens were the first to feel her influence, and look at her, and hold their heads up well, and have deep imaginations. Then the youths took the temper of the moment from them, and found a higher beauty of the distance in their eyes, and upon their lips a graver, and a sweeter, turn of smiling.

Even the fiddlers three, and the piper, worthy to perform before King Cole, took a softer stroke of melody, and worked their funny-bones more gently. Perched up in the branches, with a rope to keep them to it, and a tankard refilled at the end of every tune, they set their heels firmer, and bedewed their hands, and nodding to one another, glided sweetly, into a plaintive and wistful air, with their pots shining chastely, in the light across the churchyard. To the movement of their music, lads and lasses circled slowly, well content with measure more sedate, and time for serious steps.

For the moonlight wavered in the play of their vibration, and put a selvage to their shadows (where the lamp shone in), and followed in and out of pale innumerable buds, and rested upon nothing, but the rugged lines of heart-wood, scarred with the jocosities of bygone dancers; whose names were wearing out, upon the tombstones down below.

"Now, Missus Littlejan, you can't get out of it no more," Rose

heard carrier Pugsley say to a very pretty woman, who was standing in a doorway. "You was the sproylest of the lot, dree years running, and not a maid among 'em can put a foot out wi' 'e, now times. You be burnin' to be at it, and your chakes confesseth. They be arl gooin' on, crule weist, and heavy like. I dunno, what hath come across the lads, since I wor one of 'em. Call your good man, that's a dear, and goo up the skip to aupway."

"And I can goo up, as suent as ever," the young matron answered, with a longing glance; "in the loomeut of the laight, they do zim weist. But conzeider the babby, Maister Pugsley, conzeider of my husband's babby."

"Drat the babby; or bless 'un, I shud zay. Our Zally will tend 'un. Zally coom peart, and vang Mrs. Littlejan's babby."

Then Rose saw the brisk little woman go up, and heard a loud hail to her, the Queen of former May times; and a merry tune broke forth, and the mood was all quick stroke again. Then Pugsley, rejoicing to see a bright success, went up the ladder to the dance himself; for he could tread a measure still, with heels, in lieu of toeing it. But Sally, who would have to give account of his doings to her mother, fastened upon him the whole speculation of her blue eyes, and left the infant Littlejohn to the ministry of angels.

"Do you see that wild horse up the hill?" cried Rose; "he is tossing, and straining, and dashing at his reins; I expect to see him break loose every moment."

"Lor, Miss, no! Never trouble about he," Mrs. Pugsley answered calmly. "'Tis only baker Pollard's young gray nag; he hooketh him up there, twaice a day. And he riglar furmiteth about, like that."

"What is there to stop him, if he breaks loose with the cart? And here come those Punch and Judy people, close behind him! Oh, he is loose, he is off!"

Without another word, she too was off, down the crooked staircase, like a rabbit through a hole, and out at the front door, which luckily was open. The baby of the Littlejohns was in the street before her, making just a little crawl, and trying to say "boo," with the mad horse striking fire, in his dash down hill upon it, and the wheels behind him flying, like a kettle at a dog's tail. Away ran a score of louts sniggering, and yelling; and women justly screamed; for death was dashing on the baby.

With a set heart, and firm bound of all the life within her, Rose Arthur stood in the very middle of the narrow roadway, before the poor baby, and pulled her white hat off, and threw it at the forehead of the horse, almost upon her. Swerving with a wild plunge—for

check himself he could not—he flung the cart high in the air, and flew on, with the reins, like a lasso, whirling after him. The loop caught the leg of baby Littlejohn ; but Rose threw it up ; and the tire of the jumping wheel tore off a lock of her long scattered hair With a dash, and a clash, all the peril was gone by, and the roar, and the scream, echoed further down the street.

Rose Arthur lay stunned by the whirr of the wheel, within a single inch of her lovely little ear ; if the wheel had not leaped, at the plunge of the horse, it must have gone over her slim white neck. When she came to herself, she was in the strong arms of a young man, who had rushed forth to save her, but too late to do more than pick her up, and worship her.

"She is killed, I do believe, you disgraceful pack of cowards!" he cried to the fellows, who came crowding now around. "I never saw anything so grand, and so barbarous. Go, and fetch your mothers ; it is all that you are fit for." There were plenty of brave young men around ; but their presence of mind had failed them.

"Thank you ; I don't think that I have been hurt," said the maiden in a whisper, and looking shyly at him ; "only stupidly frightened. But how is the baby?"

"The baby is laughing in the arms of its mother. But you, who are worth ten thousand babies——"

"Please to put me down, sir. I am not so giddy now. Oh, here comes Mrs. Pugsley! I am most thankful to you, though I cannot tell you properly."

"You be off, young man!" cried the carrier's wife, for the Westcombes were unknown on this side of the moor ; "you han't done no harm, and you han't done no good. Be off, I tell 'e. Bain't no place for you. Hus be going to examine this young leddy." The dismissal was urgent ; there was no plea for lingering. Everybody seemed to say, "What do you want here? Who are you, to abuse the Moreton folk?" With a deep bow, meant for Rose, but received by Mrs. Pugsley, in the ample region where she tied her apron strings, he accepted the decision of the public, and was off.

But all excellent intentions must have some luck somewhere ; if capable of paying for it, and eager so to do. And Pollard, the baker, who was sitting on his flour-bin, sadly scoring, with his white material, a loss of more than £3 10*s*., from the breakage of shaft, and bolt, and panel, and a spring of five leaves, and the gray colt's knee, and a host of little items of the ruefullest arithmetic—he did signal justice to that young man's lofty character, without assigning reason.

But Mrs. Pollard knew the reason; and she kept it close as dough, until the brewer's charm begins. The reason was, that young Jack Westcombe, before he started for his long night-walk, provided a curl paper for a curl. Or, to put it more precisely, he gave a £5 note for the silky tress, which he had discovered between the sprung tire, and cracked felloe, of the cart's surviving wheel. He might have had it gladly for five shillings; but love scorned such an insult.

CHAPTER XVI.

"THE RAVEN."

MUCH has been said well, and written even better, about the vast progress of the age, in all things, except honesty, courage, and kindliness. These are of small account; when a man runs, his loose ends must blow away behind him.

Everybody said, in Christowell, where the people have always been considered very wise, that the Government of the United Kingdom was conspiring to rob honest people. When a man got a letter, his first business used to be, to pay for it, and then to stick it on his mantel, for a picture; until such time, as a great book-scholar should be in need of twopence, for a glass of beer. But whoso got a letter for a penny, or a thank'e, was it fair to expect him to pay twopence, every time he got it read to him? The opinion of Christowell, headed by the landlord (into whose till, every twopence must have travelled), was distinctly, and deliberately, this —that the post had no right to deliver letters for a penny, without providing somebody, to come and read them *gratis*.

This matter had scarcely been under discussion, so much as four months, when a new upset arose. The cobbler, in every village good enough to have one, was regarded by the Government, in all the new arrangements, as the first claimant to the postmastership, in right of his professional complicity with wax. Hence it will be manifest, that Mr. James Trickey, though curt perhaps of graceful courtesy, was strictly correct from an official point of view, in his highly suggestive demonstration to Carrier Pugsley, when rooted in the rut. No man should ever be condemned, at first sight, whatever part of his organization is foremost to woo stern criticism.

The mind of that postmaster was in a state of unusual tension, and wholly indifferent, as the mind in office must be, to any good

works beyond its own vocation. His appointment was new, and he had to justify it; for the village, having done without a post-office for centuries, not only saw no need of it, but had a right to be indignant; though the elder folk, having larger toleration, said, "Let un coom; her taime wun't be long. 'Tis a get up to sell gate-postesses; and nubbody buyeth they, in these here parts."

Master Trickey knew better, and was proud to do so; and holding himself above inquiries, would neither take, nor make them. In refusing to answer, he was right, as a man always is, when he knows nothing; but in sternly resolving not to ask, he showed perhaps less wisdom. For although he could read with some fluency in the Bible, and do the fourteen generations, he could not make out the tremendous words, in which the vast era of progress began. He was told, in his orders, to "communicate, in anticipation of emergency, with the central administration." This puzzled him, for it sounded like the Prayer-book, only bigger.

Now if he had taken this question to his minister (as exhorted to do, in a book, whose clear English shall never be surpassed by the very biggest writer), his difficulties might have been duly solved, and he must have got an order for a pair of fishing-boots; which by reason of his "reticence," was quite lost to the parish, and even went as far away as Newton Abbot. For Mr. Short made a point of knowing what his own folk were up to, and a point of honour when his letters were concerned; and he never made surer of anything in his life, than that such a wiseacre as Jem Trickey would be at his door, thrice every day, with something to be explained three times. There scarcely could be a more liberal man than the parson, a strict Conservative—a race of men who practise true, and let the others prabble truculent philosophy. And now the parson proved all this; for he paid 5*s.* *extra*, rather than wear a pair of boots, to the profit of such a Radical.

Master Trickey felt these things and lamented in the bosom of his family. In public however, he declared, that such considerations were beneath him, that an officer of the Crown must be above small byses, either of eather or of learning; and parson's behaviour should have no effect upon him, no more than to keep one pew buttoned on a Sunday, and the letters for the vicarage to the tail of the delivery. But even before his grievance ripened, or the vicar knew that it was growing, this haughty layman bit the dust, at the feet of Mother Church, and Father Short.

For a very remarkable thing happened now, one of those facts which defy defiant reason, and set at naught all purest process of

induction, deduction, or *reductio ad absurdum*. Christowell remembered many things, that could not be explained away ; but these had left off happening lately, so that the upstarts grew too bold, and the veterans (rasped of the crust of reason, by the roughness of hard life) told one another that the Lord was now clock-time, to read they young cockahoops a warning. And a warning now was read to them, which made them shake in their moonlit beds, and turned all argument into agreement, and stupid young fancy into stubborn faith again. For the author of evil (who never can be satisfied even with his own exertions, and is famed for "looking over Dartymore," as keenly as over his own pet Lincoln) in this crisis of "postal development," came officially, as the father of lies, to look after letters, and robbed the mail.

Jem Trickey had a son whose name was Bob, a truthful boy (comparatively speaking) and one who could be trusted largely, if he were not tempted. Neither was that the only thing remarkable about him ; for he was also a boy that kept his pockets buttoned, and his heels together. He had tight little calves, like smart balls of blue worsted, and forks of Nankin—called in high society "breeches"—which ran up to his middle, when his legs began to run. And his legs ran often ; for he was a very earnest boy, eager to be the very foremost of his age, an example to the other boys – the which they pelted stones at—to the girls a riddle, and in larger view intended for a postman of letters at a penny.

This boy was fortunate in the possession of a parent, who not only had keen perception of his genius, but also the power to make it pay. Under the new Act of Parliament, Bob, being early of age at fourteen, was appointed to the salary of head-postman, and his father cut him out a pair of cowskin gaiters. No other postal district could compare with this, for innocence, and charity, and the absence of ill-will ; because the population was so scanty. Yet even here, there were people found to say, that sometimes it was possible to have too much leather.

Now the weather was fine, and the time of year beginning to be cheerful, and abundant with variety of flowers. Every man, leaning on his shovel in a meadow (which is one of the things that he is most inclined to do) was pleased, and yet saddened to behold the same things coming up, that used to come up such a many years ago, when he was a child, and spent hours with them. Ah, the times were better then ! He got his victuals, without labouring, he ran about, and played, and slept, whenever he was minded ; the taste of everything was better, and the size much larger, and every

year put on his life was strength, instead of stiffness. But for all that, if the Lord came now, and said, "Will you go back again?"—he would think no more of doing so, than the flowers to shrink back into bud, and be buried in the root again.

Sam Slowbury did not particularly go through that, or any other process of mind, as he was leaning on his shovel; for his nature was not to think a thought that it could help, any more than to dream a dream—which he did yearly—or to do a rapid stroke of work, the which he did never. But conscience is the guide of duty, as many learned moralists have shown, and can show again; and the proof of the pudding is in the after-taste. Sam Slowbury's conscience only told him, that he ought to have more wages. Captain Larks, who could not afford to give romantic wages, was paying Sam now, one and tenpence a day, and Sam did the value of tenpence. He was turning up a mixen, in a meadow near the lane, or rather he was helping it to turn itself; while Mopsy, the cow, with creative pride looked on, and increased in her own self-esteem. Then Slowbury stood more still than ever, if possible, while he stroked the cow; and she, like a very faithful creature, made no other movement than a kinkle in her tail. Everything was pleasant, everything was gracious; there seemed to be a richness of green upon the grass, and a delicate blue in the air, and a desire of the weather to be kind, and happy. Sam felt it; and it added to his leisure, and benevolence, and the way in which he looked about.

"I dun'now as ever I zeed a vainer marnin' coom out o' the top of the sky," he said, with a truth of observation, not often to be found in our most accomplished weather-clerks; for if the fine morning comes from the horizon the issue of the day is doubtful. "But who be thiccy coming up by graveyard? Jem Cobbler's buy, zure as I be a zinner!" The identity of the boy was the most important question, that had occurred since breakfast-time. Sam even went a yard or two, up the bank, to get a more masterly view of him, and established his shovel in the happiest attitude, for support and comfort. But so persistent is human care, and so vast the activity of the human mind, that no sooner was it settled beyond dispute, that the figure approaching was the cobbler's son, than another question, even more absorbing, rose defiantly—Whatever could be compelling this scion of leather, to wear out his paternal boots, like that?

For Slowbury could not see, although he used his eyes with diligence, the thing the boy had in his hand, and largely in his head as well. It was one of the new "Mulready envelopes," just come down from London; and the head of the boy was unsound

about it, because he had never seen the like before; and now he had got five-and-twenty of them, mainly for people who could not read. "Deliver fust to they as can intarpret," his father, who was nearly mazed at the size of the bags, gave orders; "'tothers may baide up to next church-time. Goo with Cappen's fust; them as payeth for their boots desarveth fust shoeleather."

Slowbury stood, and watched the progress of this boy with pleasure. But presently he beheld a thing, which made him throw his shovel down, and sit, and bless the angels, who alone can fend the Pixies. From the corner of the churchyard, where the tombs lay thickest, a tall figure, flaring in the sun, leaped forth, with a wonderful explosion, and a cloud of pitchy smoke. Sam was ready to swear that he was not mistaken, in seeing nothing more for at least five minutes; and then if it was anything to bear an affidavit, it was the chap from the gravestones jumping, out of the cloud, to the top of our old church-tower. And sure enough, when seven unmarried men were sent to the top of that church-tower, they found a place where the moss had been knocked off, and they came down according to their speed, declining (as soon as their breath was restored to them) to go up any more, unless they were strung up to the bell-beams. This proved every syllable, that came from the mouth of Slowbury; out of which came very little (as soon as he knew what he was about) without a great deal of very solid, and highly liquid substance going in, at the sole charge of the inquirer.

There is no justice to be traced, in the affairs of men or boys, without dreadful ingenuity. What had Sam done, to make a pocket out of this affair, more than lean on his shovel, and arouse himself to look a bit, and regard with satisfaction the distance of the miracle? Even when the cloud passed off, and the church was as bright as she ought to be, this man discovered that his duty to his master strictly forbade him to approach what he had witnessed. He retreated to another mixen, nearer to the house, where a man at work might hear the wholesome cocks a-crowing, and the thumping of the churn at dairy. And he took Mopsy with him, for company, because his heart was in the frimitts.

On the other hand, the real hero of this strange adventure not only sucked no profit thereout, and no increase of character, but received knotted strap from his father, and was threatened of his life, if he told a word of it. And so do the greatest events get deformed, (when chance has protected them from smothering,) that only two people in Christowell—the postmaster, and his gaitered

son, could find any motive for that outbreak of the Evil One, except the sad nature of his constitution.

But the nature of the human creature always has some spotty places, where the good light enters. Black Wenlow was glad, that his outrush from the tombs, and shower of fireworks of his own construction, scared the poor boy so, that no blow was needed ; as he fell on his back, and cast away the letter ; for feeling is swifter than thought, and Bob felt that these wicked inventions brought Satan upon him. Then the sheep-skinned villain vanished, not over the tower, but into a cross cut which led him to the moor.

There is a house, or at any rate was then, far away, among the hills and hollows, from any other place, where people dwell. How anybody came to dwell there, none but those, who knew the ins and outs of mining on the waste, can pretend to say, if even they can do it. But there this miserable building stood ; and a man, who was no more miserable than his fellow-men, had his home there. For savage wilderness, iron-browed hills, and rocks of peaky profile, like a row of hideous giants, were more to the taste of Gruff Howell, than the sweetest landscape, and the kindest sun. To take the rough and the smooth together, is a test of magnanimity ; but Howell took the rough, without the smooth, in fare and footing, in climate and in clothes, and in company, whenever he got any to enjoy.

It was said, by the gentler folk afar, that he deserved no better ; himself not being fit company for a Christian ; and if he had his due, he would be swinging now in chains, as a pirate, on the hill of landscape looking over Plymouth Sound. But instead of that, he kept the *Raven*, by the side of a mine-road long disused ; and no idle rumour disturbed him there ; for his customers were the moor-men only, a silent, hard-living, and wandering race. But even they asked one another, sometimes, about the queer couple, Griffith Howell, and his wife.

The house had been built by the miners of old, and therefore was substantial, and well-squared. For some granite masonry, as fair as need be wished for—including the tower of Christowell church, which they built in wholesome gratitude for a great success—has been done around the moor, and upon it, by the miners. And they must have been sturdy fellows, to have reared the *Raven*, without being blown out of the windows.

For here are strong concourse, and mighty deliverance, of every wind that sweeps the sea, buffets the land, or scours the sky. It is a hollow of the hill-crest well contrived, as the chimneys of new

houses are, to suck down the gust that is wandering overhead, as well as to catch up the rollicking blast that follows the floor of the country. Not a tree, nor a shrub, scarcely even a furze-mote, or a stub of dead ground-oak, varies with a looser twang the perpetually tense wail of the wind on granite—a tone too dismal, and too dreary, for echo, or description.

Gruff Howell was sleeping, like a lawyer's conscience, richly, and without prejudice. He never went to bed much, but achieved his rest, like a warrior on a tomb, with his clothes on.

To-night, the wind was scarcely even keeping itself in practice; and the moon was having an unusual turn of insight into the *Raven*. All around, the hills were silent; and the long pale shadows lay, like flaws of calm on tidal waters; while the "holy circles," where unholy deeds had stained the moor, stood up, like ghosts that have no churchyard. Only the solemn bird, that watches the dim night for a century, and times its slow watches with a croak, was moving, uneasily moving his long gaunt body, with the platform of his frayed nest waiting in the crag, for him to mend.

Suddenly the poor old mastiff-bitch, who wandered round the house at night, gave three sharp yelps, and made a spring; but receiving a blow on the nose fell back, and in that position became qualified to digest a kick in the stomach. Then a storm of thumps broke upon the hob-nailed door, and a mighty noise rang through the house; till the master looked out of the window, with an oath, and pointed a long gun at his own porch. "Come down," said a stern voice; and down he went, while his wife shivered worse than at fifty burglars.

Old Griffith Howell now was longing, as his wife sincerely hoped, to turn a new leaf of his life, to cast away the works of darkness, brew his own beer, and give no credit. For since the penny-post came in, the heavens had blessed him with a great surprise. He had heard of his only son, a soldier, long astray in foreign parts, and long despaired of in home quarters; and without falling under proper average of reason, he placed such a piece of news entirely to the credit of the penny-post. And this made him pay attention now to the doings of his visitor.

"The candle is enough. Rake the fire together, and put a block of dry peat on. Go for the loaf, and the streaky bacon, and the sharp knife with the heel to it. Very well. This packet is for me, with urgency? Leave me to consider it, while you see to the victualling. Don't draw the ale, till I tell you, mind. When my supper is ready, you may go to bed again."

With these words, the man of the sheepskins, looking thoroughly weary, sat heavily down at the oaken board set up for a table; with a jerk of his thumb, he broke the seal of the letter, which Howell had given him, and read it by the grimy yellow light. And though he was glad to find little to do, his nasty temper made him grumble at it.

"Child's work—mere child's work—an insult to me," he muttered, while Howell went fumbling about; "even the forgery all done to hand, and directions, as if I were a stupid errand-boy. 'Put this slip in with the opened letter, seal with the seal enclosed, and post it, but not at Christowell, to-morrow.' Very good; very well; it shall be done, sir; as the fates have made you my master for the present; though you don't catch me going near a post-office. No sham civilization for me. I have taken to the moor, and mean to stick to it."

CHAPTER XVII.

ON THE BRINK, AND OVER IT.

IGNORANT of all plots against him, and even of any occasion for them, Captain Larks was proceeding steadily, with the garden-labours of the year. For May is a month of urgent call, and claim, from every rooted being, whether from under the blurred and mottled sky, which man spreads over them, or from beneath the clearer blue of nature's glazing only. This is the time, to rise right early, to breathe crisp air, and tread fresh earth, and do brisk work, that shall brighten up the heart, with beauty, and with goodly relish, in the by-and-by of resting.

Shall we be content, to maunder, and to let the right hand flag, among the many works that claim it, for no better reason than some trivial flout within ourselves? Somebody has run down our work; some boy has thrown a stone, and sped away rejoicing; some jealous brother of the spade declares, that we are but a tinkling cymbal; worst of all, some foe has darkly re-assessed us, when we paid three times too much already—yet all these woes, though a single day inflict them, shall not stay the true hand, one half-hour.

"I find it like this," said Captain Larks, as he set his heel firmly on a leather-coated grub, "that if I begin to think, think I may, and be nowhere at all, but only grow 'weist,' as they 'all it about here,

instead of growing wise. But if I begin to work, there I am; something to show, and something to grow; and a thankful heart, and a peaceful spirit. Now for the last, and the maddest of my crazes, according to some of the wiseacres; though in bare fact, a great success already."

Has there ever been a craze, that was not a great success, in the opinion of the crazy one? Not that the captain deserved to be so called, by reason of his present crotchet; for verily there was good sense in it, as well as small risk, and much beautiful amusement. What he wanted to establish, was an English vineyard; the which used to flourish many centuries ago, and is to be heard of, every now and then, as flourishing here and there, down to the present time; with taste, skill, and money, and good luck, to help it.

Bacchus loves the hills, as the ancient writers tell us; and yet he detests rough mountain winds. Let a nook be found for him, with crag enough to shelter, and sun enough to warm his graceful curls, and soil enough to feed his juicy growth; then let human skill nurse him daily, human force scatter his countless foes, and Fortune and Providence alike smile on him—and in a fine season, there may be some sour grapes.

Here, beneath the rough crest of the moor, the home and shelter had been found, the nurture of light shelf-land, and reflected warmth of sun, whenever he came out. However, there had been no grapes as yet; but nothing could be simpler than the reason—they were not going to begin too soon. "Everybody knows," said Mr. Arthur, "what is the consequence of allowing the vine to fruit prematurely. Eager young people, like my daughter Rose, may long to see a dozen bunches upon every vine, before the stem is thicker than a knitting needle. But that is not my system, sir."

The third season's growth was now beginning; and the sight was very pretty to a gardening mind. For a nook of cliff, perpendicular above, and shelving at the bottom, had been well fenced off, so as to help the native curtain of the rock, in fending the summer gale; and also to shut out wandering pigs, and gormandizing cows, and the graceless sheep, without even a horn to drag him to the altar by. And now, in the shelter of their sloping nest, more than three hundred maiden vines were peeping at the prospect of the sky. Whether should they come out of bud, throw forth another joint of growth, with a heel of leaf to stand upon, and a comb (like the fringes of a moth) to go on with; or whether should they abide a wee bit longer, within the golden cider of their mantles; and thus reserved give the sun to understand, that his meaning was kind and cordially

welcome, but not yet established against white frost. Some did the one thing, and some did the other; according to the impetuosity of sap.

What a pleasure it is to see a man look happy! Partly, no doubt, because that pleasure is so rare. But now Captain Larks, with his leathern apron on, and leather behind him for to sit upon, and a great many pockets full of everything he wanted, sat down among his vines, and did look happy. For these came along the ground, not ramping upward, neither flabbing downward with a dissolute redundancy; but curt, and vigorous, and robust, with every joint as ripe as a boiled ox-tail. Like the fingers of a star, they were spread above the earth, led horizontally to catch ground heat, at a height of about nine inches; and a man might sit upon the ground among them, and lift his head, as in an orchestra of fiddling, and thank the Lord, who made him, for the better music here.

"Father, I tell you, once more, that you are too bad, when you get into this dreadful corner," young Rose almost shouted out; so jealous was she of this little vineyard, in which she was not allowed to work as yet, because she did not understand it; "and I assure you, without exaggeration, that I must have been half an hour looking for you; and here you are, just as if nobody ever had serious business to attend to!"

"Well, let us have the serious business. I see a great deal too serious here." The captain had found five snails stuck together, looking into one another's windows, as they will.

"I intend to come up; though I dare say you don't want me," cried Rose, as she gathered in her skirts, and stepped lightly; "there now, I have not even frightened a bud. You will have to call me in, to help you soon, jealous as you are, dear father. Now my news is, that a gentleman is come, who wants leave to fish in our little stream, so please you."

"I can't attend to him now; and I can't have him flogging away, through my pear-trees. Don't you see, that I have got nearly thirty bushels of old tan, to spread along the ground, before these vines are one day older? And all to do myself—every bit of it, myself. I can't have clumsy fingers here. Tell him to go, and fish some other river."

"That would be a nice thing for me to say, papa, to a gentleman who caught me up, when the horse knocked me down so, at Moreton."

'Rose, sometimes you are quite as provoking, as a full-grown

married woman. Was I to know, by instinct, who this man is? If he has been kind to you, he may fish for ever. Tell him so, with my compliments; and say that when he has done, I shall hope to see, and thank him. But fishermen never want to be disturbed."

"Like certain other people, who are too busy to be mentioned. This gentleman's name is 'Washton,' I believe; and he wants some trout for a sick lady. If it were not for that, he never would have taken the liberty of asking leave."

"Fishermen always want fish for sick ladies. And they mainly take the liberty of not asking leave. However, let him fish, to his heart's content, if he doesn't hook my pear-trees. I dare say, he doesn't know a trout from a Forelle."

"If he gets a good catch, you shall have a dish for supper. I shall watch him in the distance; I love to watch a fisherman; his looks are solid wisdom."

"Short is the only man, who can make head, or tail, of the fish in this water; but let Mr. Washton try his hand, my darling. A very sick lady could eat more than he will catch to-day."

"He looks as if he could fish well," said Rose, hastening with bright cheeks, and brilliant eyes—for she still was a child when excited—to authorize, and behold the sport, if any.

"Don't rob him of his fish, you greedy little creature," her father shouted after her, down the vineyard hollow; "let the sick lady have every one he catches."

Rose kissed her hand, to show that she would be obedient; and then at a very nimble pace set off, with her slender form glancing in and out of tender foliage, towards the bottom of the meadow, sacred to the good cow "Mopsy."

For here it was, that she had been at work, and singing pleasantly, weaving a disc of primrose-buds, with purple shade of violets, when a fishing-rod came through the hedge, and a hat full of amazement after it. "You have made a mistake," said Rose, looking as calmly as Mopsy at him, "this is my father's property. We are very particular about our fences."

The ingenuous youth betrayed much confusion, or at any rate tried to do so; and tried very cleverly, with the stern truth against him—that he knew all these things, and now was here, in virtue of that knowledge.

"How stupid I am! I beg a thousand pardons," he answered with profound humility; "but I thought these moorland streams were free. But I see that there is a most lovely place here—a gen-

tleman's private residence. Forgive me; I was thinking of a lady who is ill; and I wanted a few trout so sadly."

"Don't go away, you shall have them," said Rose; "if I can find my father; and if you can catch them."

With admirable patience, he had waited, gazing into the desired land, and envying the Christow at leisure straying through it, the cow, that could come up, and breathe on Rose's shoulder, and even the grass, that such a blessed cow made milk of. For verily, this young man was stricken with a great and lifelong blow, from simply opening his arms, and finding a maiden there, in the street of Moreton. No mere flash of fancy, or dazzle of sight, or sparkle of admiration, but a deep and high power of a larger existence than his own, and a rapture of ennoblement. For a week, he had seemed to be walking in a dream, and his tongue had turned white, though he used it very sparingly. There was no cure for him, but a hair of the dog—but out upon such low metaphors!

Now, as he sat upon the bank, outside of his Paradise, pretending to be busy with his fly-book, he espied, through a neat little peep-hole of twigs, the maiden of his heart coming back to him. And being at such a respectful distance, he was not afraid to watch her; which the bashfulness of love prevented him from doing at close quarters. Surely, there never was till now a form so graceful, a walk of such sweetly flowing elegance, a poise of the head so delicate and maidenly—ah, now she was coming, and he could not look! He would wait for the heavenly music of her voice.

"Plaise, sir, be 'e the young man, as wor axing lave, vor to vish in this here watter?"

The capricious Rose had stopped at home, and sent Moggy to represent her. Jack Westcombe was so vexed, that he scarcely cared to answer, but jumped up, and stared at Moggy, with cheeks even redder than her own.

"'Cos if 'e be," said Moggy, "Cappen zeth 'e be kindly welcome. And a' will come and look arter 'e, for fraid of 'e kitching of our vroot plantesses."

This little addition was of Moggy's own invention; for she said to herself—"Where be the young chap's manners? A' standeth there like a stuck pig, as if I wor a Bartlemy!" Then off she walked, with a sharp toss of her head, and a strong impress of heels upon the soft grass of the meadow. She considered herself a very pretty girl; and she liked other people to agree with her.

Westcombe's mind was as reasonable, perhaps, as any mind can hope to be, at the age of three-and-twenty; and he might have

been sure, that no gentleman would have sent him that rude message. At first however, he turned round in dudgeon, and began to take the fly-collar off his fishing-line ; and if there had not been a hitch about this, his life might have hung upon a very different loop. But when a man is in a hurry, (and for certain, if his hurry be knotted with anger,) every little thing that can converge to a confluence of tangles, rushes into every kind of complication, with a subtlety that proves the multiplicity of the devil.

Now many young fellows would have gnashed their teeth, pulled out a seven-bladed knife, and slashed away. But Jack was gifted with a turn of obstinacy, equal to any ingenuity of gut ; and instead of growing pettish, he became more calm, while he worked with his fingers expediently. Presently, this patience and consideration spread from his fingers to his mind, through that sympathy between them, which compels the mind to clench the fingers, when it waxes wrathful. And thus he began to see the folly, and the littleness of taking offence, where none is offered.

"The captain is fond of his little joke, perhaps," he said to himself, taking up his rod again ; "and probably he agrees with Dr. Johnson, in the greatest mistake of that great bear. Never mind, I shall go on, and take my chance. Possibly, I may see somebody again ; or at any rate, I may think of her."

It happened to be both the hour, and the day, when fish with one accord begin to feed. The eldest, truest, and deepest chip of the ancient block of Zebedee (who is pretty sure, even in these tumble-down times, to be of Apostolical succession), however shrewd his study of the loaves, and fishes, cannot predict when the fish will want their loaf, but is ready to present them with the hook, upon demand. The water is the same, and the weather has not changed ; to the keenest human eye and sense, there is no sign of difference ; yet certain it is, that for hours together, no trout will even look at the very finest fare ; and then all of a sudden, as if the dinner-bell rang, off scampers every trout to his private napkin-ring, wags his tail, and fans his fins, and goes up and down, like a Corporation saying grace.

Westcombe was not at all a mighty dab at angling. That noble absorption of all conscious existence, upon the behaviour of a small cock's hackle, that absolute devotion of entire brain, and heart, to the humours of a slippery speckle, just beginning to outgrow a tadpole—those high and wondrous powers of nature, which turn a man into a fisherman, had not been vouchsafed to this young fellow. However, he could throw a fly very neatly, and pull out a fish, when

the hook stuck in him ; and elated with unusual success, he worked away, to surpass all previous record. And at least a score of trout were considering, with gasps, the texture of a Plymouth basket, by the time that he came to the captain's drawbridge, and doubted about going higher up the stream. For here were flower-beds, and pretty walks of gravel, and pet places looked upon by modest cottage-windows.

Fearing to trespass upon favour, he turned at this point, and began considering. Beyond doubt, a dish of fish was due to the good owner, together with the decency of thanks for his permission. And yet it would be an awkward thing, to march up to the door, knock, and introduce himself, and seem to want to disturb the captain in his well-known retirement. So he thought, that he would fish his way back again down stream, and find perhaps some workman, or some messenger to send. He forgot that the weather, which makes trout feed (unaccountably, as aforesaid) has a thoroughly national, and rational effect, upon the British workman, despatching him, without delay, to the happy realms of slumber. The only failure of accord between them, was that Sam Slowbury felt the weather, even more promptly than the trout, and had his mouth wide open for the flies, five minutes before theirs were ready. At a corner of the brook, about an hour ago, the fisherman either heard, or seemed to hear, a very loud sound in the distance of the land, regular, and to some extent harmonious ; which he took for the roaring of a bull upon the moor.

"At it again ! It is really too bad," suddenly Jack Westcombe heard a lively voice pronouncing ; "an hour and a half, is his allowance after dinner ; and now he must have been four hours at it, solidly ; not to mention all his little dozes on his shovel. Rose, if you insist upon my keeping such a fellow, I shall call upon you to pay his wages."

"But think of all the very small Slowburies, papa. And if he is not very quick, remember, how thoroughly good-natured, and quiet he is."

"Quiet indeed ! Do you call that quiet? I call it the very loudest snore I ever heard. And here is the gentleman fishing. I was coming to look for you, and thank you, Mr. Washton, for your kindness to my dear child the other day. Don't think me ungrateful for having been so long. I expected to have seen you further up, long since ; and being very busy, I forgot how time goes by. You might have filled your basket, up the brook, by this time. I heard the trout leaping there continually."

"Oh, thank you, I have done quite as well as I could wish. I fear that you will think me very greedy, when you see them. I am sure, I am very much obliged to you, sir. May I go to your door, and leave a few with the servant? I have had famous sport, much more than enough for my dear mother, and all of us."

With these words Jack Westcombe leaped up the bank, as gracefully as stiff legs could do it—for the sake of Rose—and with a brave bow, but a very timid glance at her, spread the contents of his basket at her feet. There was not a fish of more than half a pound among them; but still they made a handsome show, by reason of their number.

"Many of the poor things are alive," cried Rose; "surely you don't let them die so slowly? I suppose it is their nature to be caught; but still——"

"Nine fishermen out of ten do it," said the captain; for he saw that his visitor was troubled, and surprised; "but a touch in the right place saves them pain; and what is more important from the human point of view, they are crisper in the pan from the happy despatch. But they are a pretty lot. You must be a skilful angler. Our trout are very hard to catch, I know. A friend of mine says, that they are like the ladies. Sometimes they won't look at you; and then again—but never mind. He is an ancient bachelor."

Westcombe stole a clever glance at Miss Arthur, to ask what her opinion was upon this question; but being a diffident young maiden, she looked down, and began to count the trout sedately. Just at the moment, when she was doing this, opening and closing her rosy lips, like a school-girl doing arithmetic, and jogging one finger at every little fish, the westerly sun, gliding out from a cloud, glanced over the dance of the water, and through a tissue of young leaves upon her. The sweetness and innocence of her face were lit up, like an opening rose; every delicate line, and soft clear colour of the perfect oval, was enlivened with thoughtful pleasure, kind will, and the bloom of faith in everything; while the power of loving, as none but women can love, waited in the clear depth of her eyes.

"Now don't be greedy, Rose, my dear," Mr. Arthur said, with a truly parental, and prosaic turn of thought, which set young Westcombe's teeth on edge, for his rapturous gaze had sealed his fate; "not one of those fish shall you have for supper, though you long to exhibit your frying powers. We thank you heartily, Mr. Washton; but we can always have them when we like. Pack them all again,

in your basket. Rose, there are many things for you to do. This gentleman will excuse you"

In a moment, the light of the world was gone, with a curtsy, from Jack Westcombe's eyes; and he began to put his poor fish away, with a very gloomy air.

"You must not think," said the captain, observing his manner with surprise, "that I am ungrateful; but I wish you to have a good dish; and as I said, we can always get them. From the freshness of the water, the Christow trout are as good on the third day as on the first; or better, according to a friend of mine. You are welcome to fish here, whenever you like. Will you come up to the cottage, and taste my cider? We have a very decent ham in cut."

"The thought is very kind. But I have far to go; and the moon will not be up till late to-night. I will thank you once more, and say 'good-bye.'"

Mr. Arthur, by this time, was so ingrained to the pleasures of a lonely life (which are the most trustworthy) that he was generally glad to say, "good-bye." But the young man lingered, and looked at him; and observing him now for the first time closely, the elder took a liking to him. In spite of wide philosophy, and vast philanthropy, most of us like, or dislike, at first touch.

"I want to tell you one thing," said young Westcombe, blushing deeply, and with the full sense of it, looking firmly at the man he spoke to; "it was not the fishing, that I came for. I came in the hope of seeing Miss Arthur. Because—because I never yet saw anybody like her. You have been kind to me; and I should be a sneak, if I did not tell you."

"What!" cried the captain; "do you mean my Rose?"

"I mean the young lady, who has been here with us. The only young lady in the whole world to me. The one who sprang out, into the middle of the road, before a mad horse, to save a baby, without a single thought of her own dear life. And by the most wonderful presence of mind, she saved the baby; but the Lord alone saved her. You look, as if I were exaggerating."

"Her account of the matter was entirely different." Mr. Arthur spoke coldly, but the quick warmth of pride in his daughter flushed his cheeks and brow.

"Of course it was. She made it out to be nothing. Her nature would compel her to do that," Westcombe exclaimed, as if he knew the maiden, ten times better than her father did; "my dear sir, I saw the whole of it, although I was too far off to stop it; and I

tell you there never was a grander thing done, by any one so young, and so beautiful."

"I scarcely see how that last point bears upon the merits of the exploit," Mr. Arthur answered, with a little of the bluntness, which always comes of solitude; "however, I am glad to hear, that my daughter did her duty."

"It was not her duty. It is no one's duty, to risk a precious life in that way. I beg your pardon, for going on about it. The difference is, that I saw it, and you hear of it. And because there was no fuss made about it, you think that I exaggerate."

"I think nothing of the kind. I know the nature of my child. And I thank you, sir, for valuing it. Also I thank you, for your manly truth, and honesty, in telling me what has brought you here. But I grieve to say—because I like you, and you remind me of a dear old friend—that you must not come here any more."

"I hope, sir,—I beg of you," the young man answered, meeting the kind, but resolute, look of the elder, with a wistful glance, "not to think ill of me, because I came this morning under false pretences. I never did anything like that before; and now that I think of it, I am quite ashamed. I tried to do without it, and really fought against it. But ever since that day at Moreton, I have not been like myself."

"I forgive you most freely for that little crime," Mr. Arthur replied with a hearty smile: "it was nothing but a young man's trick. Another thought would have put a stop to it."

"Then why am I to come no more? I will pledge my honour, to do nothing underhanded. I tell you the truth. I shall never care for any one in all the world, except your daughter. It will make no difference in my feelings, if I have to wait fifty years for her. At the same time, I beg to state, that I hope to get her sooner; but without attempting anything outside your knowledge. I know well enough, that I am not to be compared with her, in any of the higher attributes. And I know her too well, to suppose that she would think twice of any of the lower ones. But for all that, I am not going to be discouraged. My father never meant a thing, without going through with it. And I am as like him as two peas; though not to be compared with him, for goodness."

"Your father must have been a peculiar gentleman, if you resemble him in character."

"My father is living, sir, and not at all peculiar. Unless it is peculiar, to be brave and upright, generally admired, and universally beloved. He is not known yet, upon this side of Dartmoor; but

everybody knows him in the western parts; and his name will last for ever, in the history of the war. You may have heard of Colonel Westcombe."

"What a wooden brain I have!" thought Mr. Arthur, sitting down, to hide a change of countenance; "so much stooping dims perception. He is the very image of his father, though taller, and stronger, and better looking. Once and for all, it must be stopped."

Meanwhile Jack was looking brightly at him, and saying to his hopeful heart—"Come now! I put it very mildly; but it must tell for something."

"My daughter told me that your name was 'Washton;' and she very seldom makes mistakes." Mr. Arthur went into this side-issue, partly perhaps to get time for thinking.

"The Moreton people, when they found my name out," Jack replied, with a quiet smile, "made 'Wasshcum' of it, with a sharp a, as in 'cash,' according to their manner of pronouncing. And so, I dare say, it got into 'Washton.' We seem to speak better, upon our side of the moor. You should come over, and hear us, sir."

"I fear there is no chance of it. You are a very young man; and I shall very soon be an old one. It would grieve me that your father's son, or indeed that any gentleman, should have reason to believe me churlish. I will tell you, if you will promise to keep what I tell you in strict confidence, even from your father, why you must never come here more."

"I will give you my honour, sir, not to speak of it to any one."

"Thank you; I know that I can trust you. The reason is simply this. Very strange circumstances, which I must not enter into, have made it the first duty of my life, to obliterate myself entirely—to conceal my existence—to desire to be dead, except for one pure precious sake. While I live in this way, my child must do the same. Not that I shall sacrifice her better life to mine. If she gives her heart to any one, and he is worthy of her, they shall not find me an obstacle. But as yet, she is too young to judge, or even think of it. And I have a right to keep her to myself, and to live as the story of my life demands; until my child's welfare compels me to do otherwise. I see that you clearly understand me."

"I am trying to do so," the young man answered, with a very dismal gaze at him; "and I am sure, that I am very much obliged to you, for trying to explain it. But I cannot see, why I should be forbidden to come any more, if I do no harm, and do not even see the young lady. It seems very hard, as you must acknowledge.

Even to see the house where she lives, and to get a glimpse of your hat, without coming near you, would be the greatest comfort to me, and give me some idea of kindness. I am sure, that you have known my father, sir, from the manner of your eyes just now; and I never yet met anybody, who had known him, without liking him."

"You are right, my lad, I have known your father well," Mr. Arthur answered warmly; "and a nobler man I never knew; and that is why I trust you. The greatest mistake in the world is, to allow, in a thing of this description, any middle course. And I will have nothing of that sort now. But if it will do you any good, or ease your mind, to be upon my premises now and then, for the purpose of catching a fish or two, I am not sure that I should prosecute you. Only, of course, you must confine yourself strictly to your angling; and only come just now and then, at considerable intervals; and feel yourself entirely on your honour, when you do come."

"I thank you with all my heart, and I will observe your conditions strictly. I shall make a point of never coming more than once a week, and of never intruding on your pleasure-grounds. And if I ever send a few fish to the house, it shall be quite anonymous, and by the man that snores so. You have taken a great weight off my mind; and I tell you fairly, that I mean to hope; but nothing whatever shall be done, I mean, of course, upon your own place, without your entire knowledge." Jack Westcombe tried to wring the captain's hand, but got rather the worst of that; for of all things potting is most hardening.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WET, AND DRY.

LIKE every other ancient faith, the angler's firm belief, that fish refuse all food with rain impending, has now been scattered to the wind and clouds. The opinion of many ages was, that having by instinct surer knowledge, than all mankind by science get, of the things that shall occur to-morrow, these finny sages fear to spoil their relish for the coming treat of worms, and slugs, and grubs, more luscious than the fattest "native," to unvitiated taste. All these will fall into their mouths to-morrow; let them fast, to keep the feast.

It is now denied by men of science—scornful of all reasoning beyond their own—that a trout surpasses them so immensely, in the science of meteorology; of which they are bound to confess that they know nothing. And feeling some reasonable doubt of that denial, they add the insidious remark (engendered by their own "inner consciousness") that even if the fish knew what was coming, they would never keep their mouths shut, by reason of their knowledge.

Be that as it will, one thing is certain, the liberal rise of the Christow fish to the hook of Jack Westcombe did not preclude a heavy rain from setting in, next morning. Whoever has the pleasure of an intimate acquaintance—and in such a case there truly is no superficial knowledge—with a genuine hearty Dartmoor rain, will be ready to admit that it has some meaning. Its main point of difference from most other rains is, that it combines all their bad qualities, and omits their good ones. However, to abuse it, only makes it rain the harder.

To prove that he was "game," and to celebrate becomingly his "most Providential restoration,"—as Lady Touchwood called it—young squire Dicky had prepared an expedition against the rats of Dartmoor, transcending his defeated invasion, as largely as the armament of Xerxes surpassed that of Darius. A *triduum* of solid combat, (such as Greeks and Romans held, but civilized armies now eschew,) was ordered to begin, upon this great morning; for Dicky's heart needed some repose from love. But lo, the very terriers, best waterproofed with wire, bore upon their flanks such bars, as the young of the salmon tribe have, or a race-horse after a heavy gallop; and such as no washing may produce upon a dog, nor anything else but a thick, steady rain, that hits them against, and up, the grain of their dear coats, and so pursues them, until their sweet skins become oozy.

Now Dr. Perperaps, beyond emphasis, and therefore in a whisper which outwent voice, had ordered, that the thing of all things his precious patient must most avoid, was the very slightest damp.

"And it ain't slight damp;" said Dicky, in his slang way, to his darling mother, as she told him this; "my name's 'ratter' this juicy day, and no mistake. Find the beggars all at home, this weather. I've got my army ready, and I mean to march. Old Dr. Perperaps went on about 'slight damp;' but he never said a word against such heavy wet as this. Hi there, you fellows, I'll be down in a jiffy."

In a jiffy, he was down, but not as he intended; for his mother,

being ample, and of very hearty substance, laid one strong arm across his back, and the other in the hollow of his knees ; and thus having whisked him off his feet, bore him right easily to his bedroom, laid him on his bed, and locked him in. Then she sent orders to his army, to march to the brew-house, and have some beer, and a shilling apiece, and retire to their tents, until the next fine morning.

When the whole expedition was thus disbanded, Dicky was released ; and recovering quickly from his indignation—for he never bore resentment long –he sauntered to his sister Julia's room, to tease her pet dog *Elfie,* and to talk about matters of importance, as he called them.

"Judy, shove aside your daubs," he said, for she was just pointing up, with fine gray eyebrows, a spirited sketch of Colonel Westcombe ; "I want to consult you about a thing, that men cannot be expected much to enter into. I have already informed you, that my affections at last are permanently engaged."

"So they always are. To a new one, every month. Be constant, Dicky, this time, if you can ; for I rather like Spotty Perperaps."

"What a pest you are ! The spotty little fright ! I am two inches taller than she is. Five feet four is the extreme lowest measure, as we say at Cambridge, of any girl I ever should make up to. You are such a height that you don't care. In fact, you had better have some short fellow ; if you are not too proud to have anybody."

"How does this bear upon your permanent affections ?"

"In this kind of way ; as you ought to know, if your reasoning process was like ours. I scout the idea of Spotty Perperaps : and I love Rose Arthur."

"Very well, let it be so. It is no concern of mine. Nothing ever comes of your adorations. The last was for a hideous bull-terrier. And probably the next will be for a badger."

"Judy, I came for your advice ; and not to be scoffed at with nasty levity. You thoroughly understand women, because you have got all their dodges in your nature. And all I ask you is a very simple thing—how would you recommend me to go on ?"

"I have never seen the girl. How can I tell you ?" Miss Touchwood answered, with large contempt. "Boys like you, have a weak idea that all the women in the world are just alike, and as utter fools as they are themselves. I can only say this,—if you want to get on, be as unlike yourself as possible."

"If you had tried for an hour, even you could hardly have said

a more nasty thing. It makes me wonder, when I come across nice girls, whether they would talk like you, after they got married. It makes one afraid to have anything to do with them. Nobody can have a finer nature than I have; but nothing ever comes of it."

"A very fine nature is its own reward," said Julia, touching up Colonel Westcombe. "But, Dicky, it never talks about itself."

"Very well. Let it do anything it pleases. I never stand up to be wonderful at all; but every man who keeps a dog is fond of me. And if all the girls think that I am to be got by snubbing me, they will find themselves in the wrong box."

"Surely," said Julia, who after all was jealous, at hearing so much of Rose Arthur, "your new angel does not snub you, as if you did not even keep a dog."

"That is the very point," answered Dicky, coming up, and showing many blue pricks in one leg; "these things made her take a liking to me; and I made the very most of them, tearing every hole that I could find, as game as if I meant to die for it. And for a long time, that scored three, every time I frightened her. But when I began to have Guinness, and to put one leg across the other, she seemed very suddenly to lose faith, and to think that I ought to put my boots on."

"Then she showed some sense, and I respect her for it. What a plague you must have been! Even when you are well, you can't stay still. And I dare say, you danced one foot all day. And you cannot say a word, about anything but vermin. How can you expect a pretty girl to like you?"

"It does not matter about that. They do," Dicky replied, as one who cites a fact, in lieu of argument; "I believe that it has something to do with this, that they think they can have their own way with me. That is the first thing all you women want. But she is very different from all you common females. Her mind is exalted, and her thoughts are large."

"It is a delight to hear that," Miss Touchwood answered, without leaving off her work; "because it might be a very awkward thing, if she were to consider you worth catching. Gossip is entirely below my notice. But the rather haughty gentleman—I suppose he is a gentleman—who calls himself 'Captain Larks,' lies under some cloud of mystery, at present. Of course, it may be nothing; but you know, as well as I do, that many people say he is a criminal in hiding. Very likely that is rubbish. But till something more is known, the less we have to with them, the better."

"Such nonsense drives me wild. What do you know of the

world? You wanted to patronize Mr. Arthur—who never yet called himself Captain anything, and cares not a rap what fools say of him—and he put you down very neatly, and completely, simply by his manner, and without a word. It was a bitter pill for you, Miss Judy. But a bit of humble-pie every day, would do you good. The captain is the kindest man that ever lived. Many people think me a softy, and a fool. And I don't stick up to be a wonder. But I do know when people have been good to me, and put themselves out of their way, to help me. And I tell you, you are not fit to dust their floor for them. Put that in your pipe, and smoke it."

With this elegant counsel, Squire Dicky ran away, stopping both ears, as if to keep out wicked language; while his sister only smiled, for she loved to irritate him, but never allowed him to do the like to her. But she could not help thinking of his very frank remarks, about her own character, and wondering whether there might be a grain of truth at the bottom of them.

"Hurrah! Here comes somebody! A plucky cove, whoever he may be," shouted the excitable Dicky, in the "corridor"—as Lady Touchwood loved to call it; "Judy, shut up your lozenge-box, as soon as you have put a little lake upon your cheeks. I was just going to send to the stable for a halter! But here comes a visitor, to ruin the new velvet. Her ladyship will be in a precious state of mind. I defy him to sit down, without a quart of drainage. And the new peach-colour runs, if a fellow sneezes in the next room."

Her ladyship however was a match for the emergency. The front-door bell had not ceased clanging, ere the much keener jingle of her own was heard, and the footman knew well which required first attention. "The little study, James, whoever it is! And put the big Bible open in the easy-chair, first." The man understood, made the only cushioned chair pretty safe from invasion; and then showed in Mr. Short.

"Capital device! I give her credit for it," said the vicar to himself, while the man went to announce him.

"Now I do call this very good of you indeed," Lady Touchwood exclaimed, without a bit of falsehood, as she came in, and made her sleeve go up, in a manner understood by women only, for fear of his fingers having dribbles to them; "an otter, or an oyster, or a conger-eel, is the only thing fit to be out, on such a day."

"I rather like it:" said the parson, with a countenance which did not express any very keen delight, except such as a joint may find in basting; "at any rate, no weather ever stops me, except such a

snow as we had, two years ago. You sent for me urgently; and I was bound to come."

"No. I have not sent for you. It has been raining, I cannot say how long. Would I dream of sending for you in such weather? I never do anything outrageous."

"I thought you might have boxed—the compass in such weather. Here is your letter, your own handwriting—though the ink may have run, with more rain, than sand upon it."

"There is both rain, and sand upon it," the lady answered, drawing back both hands; "but I never wrote a word of it. You know that I never use sand now. I keep it in the inkstand; but I scarcely ever use it, except from habit, when I happen to forget. This is not my writing. At what time did you get it?"

"About twelve o'clock. Trickey leaves my letters to the last, because of these boots you see. I will tell you that, another time. What you say makes me a little uncomfortable. I could have sworn, this was your handwriting."

"It not only is not my handwriting, but it is a very clumsy imitation of it. And do I put it this way—'Lady Touchwood presents her compliments to Mr. Short'—after all the years that I have known, and liked you?"

"I know that you never begin like that; except when something has put you out. But excuse my remembering, that you did write so, about six months back, when I had vexed you. And I thought that you might have been annoyed again, though I could not call to mind my fault. And that made me order my horse at once; for I had some idea—but never mind that."

Mr. Short's futile idea had been, that Lady Touchwood must have discovered, at last, his admiration of her daughter; and this had brought him straightway, to face the question.

"That letter was posted at our post-office, and in one of those horrid new envelopes," the lady proceeded with that calm judgment which we all exert, upon the troubles of our friends; "you may depend upon it, that you have been decoyed from home, for some bad purpose. Either to rob you on your road, or to rob your house, while you were away. Everybody says how rich you are."

"It is good to have the highest of all characters. Since you have not sent for me, and do not want me in this morassy state; I will say 'good-morning,' Lady Touchwood."

"You shall do nothing of the sort, until you have had one of those long twisted glasses (from some undiscovered country) of my white-currant cordial. There is no Mrs. Short to look after

you, or to reproach me for not doing so." Lady Touchwood gave a sly glance herewith, for she was much too sharp, not to know of his weakness for Julia, and had no fear of it. "But you came through the rain, to oblige me, as you thought; and you are frightfully soaked; and riding home you will have the wind on your back, and get lumbago. You know my patent cordial, don't you? None of your currant wine—oh, Lord!—but the very finest whisky and white currants, done by a very old receipt, and bottled to stand upright for at least seven years."

"It sounds very good. But shall I stand upright, or sit upright in the saddle, with the wind upon my back, and lumbago coming? I will take nothing more than a glass of your old ale, the golden ale made of the Wiveliscombe malt; and then I will ask your good son Dicky, for one of his long old tough cigars. With the wind on the crupper, it will last me all the way."

These things were sent for, and the horse was ordered (much against his liking, for he was just doing nicely), and then Lady Touchwood took the opportunity of putting a word in season, just at the genial moment of good relish, which a fine ham-sandwich gives to ale. "And how is Captain Larks getting on?" said she. "Everything he does is so delightful. When will you bring him over?"

"As soon as he will come," replied the wary parson. "Why should I hurry him? Am I bound to commit social suicide? I feel myself cast into the shade already, because there is no romance about me."

"No, no, you are never in the shade," cried the lady, being dull at metaphor; "everybody knows every atom about you. He is the one, that is in the shade. But I am sure, that he never deserved it."

"He appears very honest, and he may be that," said the vicar, with a solemn shake of head; "but where did he get his silver spoons?"

"Come now, you are a great deal too jealous." Lady Touchwood always supposed a person, who did not smile, to be in earnest. "If there is anything the matter with him, it must be at least of the upper classes. He has been accustomed to the best society. I am sure, he never would do anything, of a lower rank than forgery."

"Let us make a round-robin, and put in the middle—'Is it forgery, is it homicide, is it treason?' Your hearty well-wishers feel confident, that you have done something respectable.' If I prepare the document, will you sign it at the top?"

"Go along. Here is your horse at the door. There never is

any reasoning with you. But I do hope that you will not catch cold, or find anything at home to vex you."

"I am not afraid. My house can defy the world, with Mrs. Agget in it, and good *Nous* upon guard. Oh, here comes Squire Dicky, just in time to say 'good-bye.' How well he looks! Why, my good friend, glass and putty seem to suit your constitution. I must build a new greenhouse, for you to tumble through it."

"I am pretty sure of one thing; if I did, you would never be like Captain Arthur. You would make me pay for it, and for all the plants too."

"What a wise babe it is! He has hit the mark. Lady Touchwood, the Cantabs always do. But don't come out in the rain, my friend. Your glazing is not water proof."

"I hope he will find his old house robbed;" said Dicky, as the parson rode away, and the story of the letter was repeated. "It would be worth a hundred pounds to me, to have a rise taken out of him. He thinks himself so confoundedly clever; and he never lets another fellow say a single word almost."

"Now, don't be so spiteful, my dear. I am sure, that you always hold your own with him. It amuses me sometimes, to hear you get so very much the better of him."

But Dicky shook his head. For he was a candid youth, and knew that he had no chance with Mr. Short, in any other view than his dear mother's.

CHAPTER XIX.

AMONG THE JACKDAWS.

AMONG the good people of Dartmoor, very few subjects (outside of their own parish) arouse more interest, or create more wonder, than a town in the south-east of England, which used in plain days to be called London, but has no idea of being now described, except as "this mighty Babylon," or "our immense metropolis."

A man came down from London once to Christowell, by some accident, and he put up at the *Three Horse-shoes*, and he called for hot brandy and water. With wonderful speed, considering the size of the village, it was heard that he was there; and nobody, who could help it, failed to go and see, what he was like. No idle curiosity was in their bosoms, neither any anxiety to drink his

health—fearfully though he must require it, for every one had heard of the plague of London—but it was the clear wish of a large community, to recognise an envoy from one even larger. The gentleman, whose residence was in Whitechapel, could by no means understand their speech ; but by help of a smoky old map in the bar—a better map of the moor than can now be got—he managed to try to drive into their heads, by a bold exaggeration of his own, that London town was bigger than all Dartmoor. Now John Sage came in, before that was got over ; and when he began to understand it—for his mind was slow, from its magnitude—the simplest truism from his lips made the bagman order slippers. For John said nothing rude, but stretched his arms across the hills, and valleys, of the map (which looked more vast from the fog shed over them by much smoke), and without turning round, he reflected thus : " Never wur I one of they, as goeth again' the Lor' Amaighty. Every day a' doeth winders. But niver, if so be a' worked all Zinday, could a' create rogues enow, to orkapy all thiccy."

Perhaps this view of the matter is unsound ; though John was never contradicted, after he once turned fifty ; for his father was known to have foretold, as true as a cathedral clock, the day of his departure from this world. But it may be argued, very soundly, that if there be in London, lawyers honest ; *à fortiori*, there must be other people of that same cumbrous quality. And, without any hazardous admission about that, it is enough to say, that in 1840, there might have been found, in the very heart of London, a firm of solicitors as honest as the day.

Messrs. Latimer & Emblin, of No. 10, Jackdaw's Court, Gray's Inn, had been in practice (through their ancestors, or selves), for upwards of a century ; and their practice was quiet, and wise, and solid. With litigation they dealt so little, that if any one asked them who was the present Attorney-General, they went to the legal almanac to look, and after much consultation, sometimes put the saddle upon the wrong animal. Yet, being always accurate in the end, and very particular not to mislead, whenever they made a mistake, they always corrected it by post at a nominal charge. And if, while alive, any lawyer can conciliate affection, it is by acknowledging that he was wrong ; with a lenient charge for confessing it.

Even as the loftiest of all watch-makers—" horologists " now they call themselves—will not allow time to make any noise near him, but glances in his office at a mute chronometer : so the very deepest lawyers hush the clack of law, on their own premises. It

must be present in the air; as the smell of cheeses from the warehouse is, where only plugs are kept to taste; but unless anybody seeks too far, it may try to pass for a sweet-smelling savour; and to analyse such things is seldom wise.

But though they declined all common-law cases (except for some client of generations), and had little to do with equity, these two gentlemen were sound lawyers, and never gave ill-advised advice. They would go through the form of consulting counsel; as a solicitor often does, when he knows much more than the barrister, or at any rate works his knowledge better. But in reality, they relied upon their own long experience, caution, good sense, and the traditions of the firm. And whenever they made a mistake, it was through undue veneration for the latter. And such a mistake they were making, at this time.

Mr. Latimer now was a venerable man, wealthy, contented, and well-endowed with those gifts of bygone generations—thick, snowy curls, and sound natural teeth. He was very particular about his dress, already becoming antiquated—that is to say, fine kersey breeches, black stockings, and buckled shoes, a straight-cut coat, a shirt, with a frill of the purest white cambric, (fastened with a brooch, containing a lock of his late wife's hair), and a roll-collar waistcoat of black silk; under whose margin, and upon a fair rotundity, glistened a broad watered ribbon, supporting a weighty gold ring of magnificent gold seals. With all these things his grave mild face, and dignified air comported well; making it difficult to imagine, and impossible to find, a more perfect specimen of a gentleman of business.

Mr. Emblin was nearly a score of years younger, taller by a head, and sparely framed. He had a little turn for sporting dress, but checked it, as much as he could, at the Office. He had some fine ideas of "going ahead," and lamented, at home, that his senior so sternly refused to have anything to do with a branch of business, now bringing in money by the bagful—to wit, the mighty schemes of mad railway companies. But he had a prudent wife, who told him of the ancient legend of the bird in hand; also he had a shrewd head of his own, and traditions of an ancestor who had been ruined by the "South Sea bubble." So that he managed to abstain; though it irked him sadly, to see the ungodly (in the form of inferior attorneys) puffed up with company fatness, and swelling about, as if the round earth was their rail.

This firm had large premises all their own, for Jackdaw's Court belonged, only in part, to the learned and honourable Society

Sundry people, sometimes so illegal as to be downright costermongers, held their local habitation there, by some original frankpledge ; and if they were questioned about their title, they supposed it to be chaff, and made answer generally, that they never stuck up to be nobs. But No. 10 stood apart from any contact with such squatters, being a goodly house, rebuilt in the reign of Queen Anne, as the date declared, with Righteousness and Peace, above the third floor-windows, kissing each other in compo.

Now Righteousness and Peace, with a wreath around them, relieved their airy costume with black, and their rippling tresses with a wealth of soot—at a shilling a bushel, which is fair price—also the railings would have paid for scraping, by a man who knows how to "utilize"; and many other little specks might have been discovered, by the boy who washed the windows of the Moreton folk. Still, when a gentleman once got in, he had many grounds for satisfaction, and perhaps for gratitude. For he found a good mat for his boots, and some landscapes to look at (instead of land, drawn and quartered, with arrows stuck through its disembowelment), also chairs of illegal nature, because they could give as well as take, and a power of attorney to sit down, and poke the fire, without prejudice.

On the first floor, a very tidy room contained some handsome old furniture, and the members of the firm, from ten until four o'clock of the day. No one, in those brave times, required sherry and sandwiches, or stout and oysters, at the witching hour of the legal noon, when writs are running rapidest, and clients go to and fro, most prone to be devoured ; but the wiser manner of solid lawyers was, to dine at half-past five, with the hungry bosoms of their family around, and a quiet rubber, or sweet nap, in prospect. Though the railways already were beginning to screech out, to make the day hideous, and the night a nightmare.

Now a good drizzle often fetches a fine day of business in London, because it is so dirty. If our "vast metropolis" attempted to be clean, it would never do half the trade it does. Not only because of the energy wasted in so vain an enterprise, nor even through the violence offered thus to nature ; but chiefly because the people, coming with the money, would be in several minds about every bargain. When all is serene, and a walk, or drive, a pleasure, as in most continental cities, a customer (even though he be of British race) hangs over his cash more dubiously. "I can come again to-morrow ; I will think about it ; I will look into my bank-book, and perhaps consult my wife," is the unsatisfactory process of his mind ; and the

likelihood is, that he never comes again. But upon a day of good substantial dirt, with the drip of a myriad umbrellas in his neck, and a very safe note of bronchitis in his throat, his dogged resolution says, "Now, or never. I have ploughed through all this muck, and I mean business."

On that day, when the rain rushed down so savagely on Dartmoor, there was in London nothing more than a drizzle, bedewing the growth of business. Dirt came up between the flagstones, as if there were a crop of cress to lift it; and getting kicked away by scrambling feet, slipped into a coat of slimy mud. Impatient men, whose time was money, at every advance lost twenty-five per cent.; while the slow, knock-kneed fellow, from the country, accustomed to slippery fallows, grinned. And, though the neighbourhood of Gray's Inn is not so very bad, when considered calmly, backsliding occurred there, not only of hams, but also of tongues under very learned wigs.

"It seems that we may almost go," said Mr. Latimer, whose manner was to offer everything in *semble;* "it is getting rather dark, at a quarter to four, even in what might be called a summer month; or at any rate used to be so considered. The extraordinary increase in the quantity of soot, that fills the air, is quite wonderful. Within my memory, our jackdaws had quite a colour of their own, and their backs used to shine, like a boot, or a bottle; but now they go about, as if they swept chimneys. Emblin, you must have noticed it."

"You have drawn my attention to the fact before," said his partner, who heard the remark every week; "but good-bye, I fear, to our chance of getting off; for here comes a carriage. Why it is my lord's, and Mr. Gaston in it! What I told you was right; he can do exactly as he pleases, in that quarter."

"I could hardly have believed it," Mr. Latimer replied; "such a self-willed man as my lord was once! But such men seem to become most helpless, when their vigour fails them. It is a lucky thing for him, to have such a man of business, shrewd, active, honest, intelligent, and a thoroughly sound Tory."

"I have not quite the opinion of our friend that you have. However, that is no concern of ours, so long as he has his credentials. Holloa! Why here he is!"

"Gentlemen, your most obedient!" Mr. Gaston exclaimed, in his playful manner, foregoing the honour of being announced. "Delighted to see you, at the receipt of custom. I said to my lord, when he grumbled about something—'You may go all over Lincoln's

Inn, Gray's Inn, and both Temples, and find no firm to compare with them.' By old Harry, I was right. And it is not only that, but the manners, the cordiality, the polish put on business."

"Sir, we are much obliged, by your good opinion. What can we do for you, to-day?"

Mr. Latimer disliked familiarity, and was a good judge of a gentleman, inasmuch as he was one himself. But nothing ever abashed George Gaston.

"Well," he said, "I begin to feel ashamed of coming so often, about a thing that seems so simple. But being so entirely trusted with this business, which cannot make the difference of a dump to me, I seem to be compelled to see about it, more than if it were my own concern. Of legal matters I know as little as a babe; and my great desire is to leave the whole of them to you, who know them so thoroughly, and are so careful. But as you know, I am not my own master; and to-day he has been in a perpetual fume. I hope you have settled something."

"I beg you to sit down, sir," Mr. Latimer replied; "you could ill be spared; and there is such a thing as being too hard upon the labouring horse. You have indeed plenty upon your hands, without being worried by this troublesome affair. But let us recount our own little share. Emblin, may I trouble you for the private day-book? Here is a copy of the very careful letter, written by my excellent partner himself, and directed in accordance with the address which you discovered, by your most disinterested labours. And here is that letter itself, bearing all the proper postmarks, and returned by this very morning's post, in this new envelope, with a very curt, not to say discourteous reply. Solitude does not perhaps improve the manners; but we long have known the gentleman to be most eccentric."

"Short, but not sweet," said Mr. Gaston, lifting his eyebrows, as he read indignantly—"'I beg to return your rigmarole. Once for all, I will have nothing to do with the bad lot I have quitted; and whether they are alive, or dead, makes no difference to yours obediently, L. Arthur.' Upon my word, such a man is outside the pale of civilized life altogether."

"So he may be," Mr. Emblin broke in, after watching Gaston narrowly; "but that does not dispense with his signature. The Company want the land; they pay a long price for it; and it is wholly impossible to convey it, without this gentleman's concurrence, or decease. My senior agrees with me. The title has been passed; and now this fatal hitch arises."

"But we don't want the money, and we hate to sell the land," cried the visitor with his red colour rising. "If they take our land against our will, surely they must take it, as they can get it. Suppose a man could force his land on me, and take my money—should I be bound to show him all the history of my money? Yet how could he tell, that it was my own?"

"In theory, there may be much in that," Mr. Latimer answered gently; "but we must consider things, as they are. These new-fangled companies, they may do good, or they may do harm—which seems more likely; but at any rate they get their Act; and no man's house is his castle against them. They take a man's land, without his leave; and if he cannot make them fee-simple without blemish, they suspend a large percentage of the purchase-money. It is tyranny of course; but if these companies endure, their tyranny will soon be a thousandfold of that. But to come back to the point, —in the face of this refusal, what are we to do for the best, to meet his lordship's wishes, and to keep things smooth? Is he still under orders to avoid excitement?"

"Sir John Tickell says no more than this, that the banging of a door (unless he banged it himself, which he does pretty heartily, as you know) might send him in a moment, far beyond the reach of medicine. I wish you would only come, and see him; he still sees old friends, upon his better days; and he has a high regard for you, Mr. Latimer."

"His lordship's remembrance, and good opinion of me," the honest lawyer answered, with a proud glance at his buckles, which had belonged to a Sir Thomas Latimer, "are profoundly gratifying. He is not one who rashly forms good opinions. Even you, Mr. Gaston, were with him some years, before you won his entire confidence. But experience has proved your sterling value."

"I simply do my duty, and deserve no thanks. But it takes a great deal, as you say, to overcome his lordship's mistrust in human nature. A treacherous son is a bad shock to confidence."

"And to lose the better one, a very bitter blow. I see that his lordship keeps his servants still in mourning. It is sad indeed, to see the ancient families die out."

"Come, Mr. Latimer," the visitor said briskly, "there is one old family as young as ever, and one of its finest representatives is here, and I have the honour of looking at him. No compliments, sir; in those I never deal. If I have prospered, and obtained some good repute, and the confidence of every one possessed of noble feeling,

it is through nothing more than plain rough truth. I say to everybody, 'you must take me as I am.'"

"But," said Mr. Emblin, who had not got any compliments, and considered his family quite as good as Latimer's, and wanted to be off, to see to a little dinner-party, "it appears to me, that we have settled nothing, about the business Mr. Gaston came to speak of; unless it is to leave things *in statu quo*."

"*Statu quo* is an excellent expression," that gentleman replied, with all his strong cordiality; "it is the proper attitude for large landowners, and their humble representatives. Let the next step proceed from the bold intruders. If they are in a hurry, we are not. We meet them with the simple fact, that we can do no more. They must leap the obstacles, in their own way. Possession is what they want; and they can have it. 'I give thee all, I can no more,' is our final answer to them. You will put the matter in the proper legal form; and there it rests, while his lordship lives."

"But," said Mr. Emblin, who was dry, and very tough, "we are bound to make another effort. This gentleman refuses to have anything to do with us. Perhaps he has a fancy that we have wronged him. None the less, the Company might find him more amenable, especially for a good consideration. Even upon Dartmoor, coin is current. Powderhorn and Bullrush, are sharp and active people. What do you say to our letting them get at him, as our side cannot do any more, and obtaining his signature, if they can?"

"An excellent idea," replied Gaston, calmly, though his face became purple, and his eyes shone darkly; "if we could only keep it from his lordship; and if it were an honourable thing to do so. Otherwise, you know what he would say—'if Powderhorn and Bullrush can do my business, and Latimer and Emblin cannot, Powderhorn and Bullrush are the men for me.'"

"Highly as we value our relation towards his lordship, which has now existed for many years," Mr. Latimer interposed, with dignity; "no fear of the withdrawal of his confidence would hinder us, from doing our duty towards him. That is not the thing to stop us. We never submit to threats. But the step which has been proposed, at a sally, by my valued partner, would not—as he knows even better than I do—be in keeping with professional etiquette. Therefore, sir, we will not adopt the course which you object to."

"How can it make any difference to me?" Mr. Gaston asked, turning round to Mr. Emblin, for he found the calm eyes of the senior partner harder to meet, than the keen gaze of the younger;

"I never understand your prim niceties of tweedledum. If I make a mistake, I bow, as every one must do, to such a profession."

"Then let it be so," Mr. Emblin answered lightly, to let the little gust of temper pass; "it is understood, that we do nothing at all, but wait on our oars, till the enemy moves. If he is contented with the title we can give him, all well and good; and let him pay the money. If not, we cannot help it, and he pays into Court a percentage against contingencies. But on no account must his lordship be disturbed, in his present state of health, about it. If anything arises, we do nothing, until we have seen you about it."

"You know better than I do, ten million times over," said Gaston impulsively; "what a plague this business is to me! But when I have once taken up a thing, I seem in someway bound to go on with it. Good-bye, gentlemen both, good-bye! You are martyrs to business; but even a martyr must not have his dinner burnt, as well as himself."

They followed him to the door, as if they did not quite understand this style of parting. Whether he was going with a friendly turn, or whether he would try—and he seldom tried in vain—to do a mischief to their good firm. For put it as he will, when his stomach is up (and somehow or other, it is most exalted, when profoundly empty) reflection will make the true lawyer less desirous to rule double line, and leave *hiatus* below the name of a wealthy, elderly, and decidedly combative nobleman. But Gaston spoke no word of weakness, and waved them an airy adieu, upon the landing.

"What do you think he will do?" asked Mr. Emblin, as his partner, without condescending to be seen, observed in a dignified manner the departure of the mighty carriage; "I am sure he is a horribly spiteful fellow."

"I neither know nor care," Mr. Latimer replied, as he went to get his plodding shoes, and thick gaiters. "He may be very upright; and his conduct seems to prove it. A common time-server would be cap-in-hand to those who are in remainder, and unhappily cannot be set aside. But one thing is certain. He is not a gentleman. He has hurt my feelings needlessly; and it takes a great deal to hurt my feelings. Perhaps, you should scarcely have said what you did. But his observation was simply brutal. Powderhorn and Bullrush, for his lordship! One thing is certain. We must do nothing, until we are properly requested to do it."

"My little dinner-party will be spoiled," said Mr. Emblin; "and

I shall be out of sorts about you too. But clearly you are right. The next move must come from him."

Now it so happened, that this was, to a nicety, the very conclusion desired by George Gaston.

CHAPTER XX.

TALL AND SHORT.

THERE was another little dinner spoiled that very day, and by the self-same omnipotent roguery of mankind, exerted perhaps, in the latter case, more frankly and respectably. However, it was sad as almost anything can be, and a far deeper outrage on the feeling of the public, than the rapid demission to their final cause of a hundred hungry lawyers.

To describe this occurrence, without exaggeration, and yet with the sympathy which cannot be refused, is beyond the highest hope of the most sanguine self esteem ; not only, because no single two persons—if such a phrase may pass in such confusion—to whatever extent they may have both been present (and the whole parish found that it had been present, as the interest waxed, and the danger waned) could upon any terms be brought to reconcile their accounts with one another's, or even with themselves ; but through a deeper denial than that—for that always happens, and a thing could not be true, if two people took the same view of it exactly —namely through a stern, but for our sakes most beneficial, law of nature, that dogs have no articulate human speech, as yet.

It was raining cats and dogs—as some loose genius has discovered to describe it—when Parson Short, drenched and almost sodden to the bone, rode up the lane from the village to his home. The vicarage, a good old-fashioned house, facing the lowlands, and sheltered from the moor, stood back in the glebe, at least a quarter of a mile from any other dwelling, and from the high-road. Large trees around it kept out the sun-glare, while they let in the play of light ; and firs of laminated verdure (like the Deodara that is ousting them) gave a stately movement to the wind, and divided the driving rain with shelter.

"My certy, something must be wrong," the vicar exclaimed, as he found no Thomas at the gate to meet him (although he was an hour now behind his time), and what was even more extraordinary,

no *Nous*, with a caper at his bridle ; then he gave a shrill whistle, but neither man, nor dog, came forth, or made any reply at all. So he unlatched the gate, with the crook of his whip, and *Trumpeter* pushed it with his saturated neck. In a minute Mr. Short was at his own front-door, but the dripping of the rain was the only sound to greet him. Getting down from his horse, with a puddle running from him, he found the door open ; and snatching a big stick from the umbrella-stand, while he shouted "House ahoy! Is there nobody alive here?" on he went to the real head-quarters of a house—the kitchen. There was nobody there, and the fire was out, his half-leg of mutton was floured for the roast, but reposed upon the table in that interesting stage ; while the dresser, that wholesome pride of Mrs. Aggett's heart, was in sixes and sevens of confusion. The master turned pale, for he expected to find murder, knowing how steady and how steadfast was his housewife. But in another moment, great relief ensued, and even a strong tendency to sad laughter.

For hearing a noise, like that of a small boy blowing through a papered comb, he grasped his truncheon firmly, and went to seek it. And there, in the furthest recess of the scullery, he beheld a sight such as he never yet had seen. Lashed to the pump by the long jack towel, so that she could move neither hand nor foot, was a fat, but highly respectable female, whom he knew by her dress to be his good housekeeper. Her face was invisible, and her tongue under disability, because the metal colander, wherein she was washing spinach, had been securely fastened over, and contained, most fittingly, the whole of her expressive countenance. Upon the upper rim of this vessel, as in a spirit of mockery, played the half-mourning ribbons of her second-best cap, a tribute of respect to the departed Aggett. Hearing her master's approach, she tried to stamp, for her temper was unequal to the strain of this adversity ; but the only result was a vibration of the pump, and a little gush of water down her sadly aching back.

With a brief word or two of manly sympathy, the vicar hastened to the knife-box, and finding the game-carver, began to cut the swathings of her long duresse. But when he would have eased her of the dark, oppressive domino, she thrust at him with her liberated elbow, and completing her freedom, made off down the passage. Mr. Short, having lofty opinion of women, looked after her, with a strong faith in her motives for this rude proceeding. And his confidence was justified, for no sooner had she found herself round a corner, where no light shone, than she dashed away the colander,

and screamed back—"No man shan't zee my vace, till I've washed un." For she was a fine cook, and she knew how spinach oozes.

"I suppose she knows where Lizzie is; or she never would bother about her face," the parson thought, with continued faith; for Lizzie, the handmaid of the house, was Mrs. Aggett's only daughter; and before he could do any more about that, his housekeeper, following the veinage of his thoughts, quicker than he could follow hers, called back from the top of the back stairs—"he hath kayed her in. I've a' heered Lizzie thumping. The black gentleman have kayed her in your sarmon-room. Go you, and see to things, it was a shame on 'e to naglax; and hus'll be down by that time."

"I fear she is very much put out indeed," Mr. Short said to himself, as he went to look round the house at large; "and what should I do if she gave me notice? But this seems a very queer thing altogether. The plate gone, of course, and all my money. However, there was scarcely £50 to steal. Oh, what am I about, to think of miserable money? My *Nous* must be dead, my most clever faithful darling! He would leap at their throats, till they killed him."

Leaving all his losses to be gained at leisure, he ran out through a side-door to the dog's abode, or rather the stall where he was chained in weather too wet for his kennel; and where he found no comfort but in mourning, when his master was away without him. Mrs. Aggett belonged to that class of women, who from defect of large sympathy, exclaim "drat the dog!" when they come across a footprint; instead of reflecting on the great superiority of the canine to the human foot, in addition to the double number. And *Nous*, who had no vanity, looked up to Mrs. Aggett; not only because of her control of bones, but also through a sense of her command of broom-handles, such as came down upon him from the wrong direction, and caught him on the back, while he with integrity was gazing forwards. And often he got a great lump by this.

His master understood these woes; and finding consolation grievous, when they made much fuss together, tried to avert the blow by strictest *alibi* of *Nous*, when undefended. For even Mrs. Aggett, thorough despot as she was, durst not descend upon the dog with all her vigour, when the master was at home; and they all knew that. At other times, it was a bitter fact, that if *Nous* came in (with an honest view to luncheon, or a laudable exercise of foresight, as to dinner, concerning both the hour and the substance)

at the very moment when he stood wiping his feet on the rope-mat, to the utmost of his conscience, a heavy thump of something void of feeling, but capable of impressing it too well, was prone to dim his happiness, and darken his reflections.

"She has brought upon herself this signal Nemesis of pump," Mr. Short muttered grimly, as he ran to look for *Nous*. "There is no rogue in the kingdom, who could steal into our scullery, while that dog was left at large. But why has he not saluted my return? He always hears us coming up the lane. Why, *Nous*, my darling! You are not dead, are you?"

The parson fell back against the stable-door, and a rush of tears dimmed his keen brave eyes. For the poor dog was lying on his side, among the straw, senseless, and motionless, and to all appearance dead. The chain was jerked tight round his neck, as a hangman's noose, with the hair standing out from it, and his body was rolled up like a silkworm spinning, or a fossil ammonite; while his curly ears, falling back, showed their silver linings, and only the whites of his eyes could be seen. He had given up all hope of himself, and only wanted to die without any more disturbance.

Mr. Short had the presence of mind to say no more. The dog had not heard him yet; and to excite him, while he was thus throttled, would cut his last hair. Stealing his steps, like a nurse at the bedside of some one afflicted with heart-disease, the master got behind him, and looked into the position. After a hard struggle of long hours, *Nous* was now at his very last gasp, and he must have been dead long ago, if he had not managed with extraordinary skill, to get the strongest claw of each hind foot, under a link of that strangling chain. To such a straight was he brought, by simple indignation at the villainy of mankind.

It was impossible to undo the chain for the dog had wrought it up into a series of spikes; but luckily a three-cornered rasp, for the hoofs of *Trumpeter*, lay handy. Mr. Short took the twisted chain between his knees, and cut a link, and eased it at the poor dog's withers, and then released it gently from his puckered throat. Hereupon a little sigh came up, from the huddled hoops of the ribs; and the nick of the nostrils lifted faintly; and the throat began to quiver, with a longing to expel a bark that had stuck fast in it. By great skill and care, he was gradually brought round; but such was his exhaustion, that when he tried to sit up, and lick his master's hand once more, his cramped legs failed him, and he fell among the hay-bands.

As soon as his favourite was out of danger, the vicar (who had

shouted in vain for Thomas), returned, in a settled frame of mind, to see how far his household gods were shorn. Being now assured that no life was taken—unless it were that of old Thomas, which appeared scarcely possible to any one who knew him—the master of the premises was ready to consider what had happened, in its proper order. And *Nous*, who displayed much more excitement, because he considered the whole fault his own, came staggering after him, to learn the worst.

Mrs. Aggett, by this time, was evil to approach. She had found her daughter Lizzie, in the sermon-room, crying, not from the effect of the discourses piled around—however touching they might be,—but through inability to escape from them, and the idea of the tombstones which they suggested; in addition to anxiety about her only parent, and a deep inner sense that she had had no dinner. Intolerant of misplaced lamentation, the mother proved the fitness of her survival, by delivering a hearty thump between the mourner's shoulders, then bidding her be off, and thank the Lord, for bread and dripping, she bustled round the house, to see how much was left of anything.

So far as a hasty survey revealed, there was very little gone of any real value. The plate was untouched; but some old-fashioned knives, and notably an ancient Oxford carver (with a heel to it, and a curved hartshorn handle), had vanished; and so had a double-barrelled gun, and a 2 lb. canister of powder, and a stiff three-jointed fly-rod, and a book full of tackle, and a few other things from the lobby of sporting implements. "A must a' been one of they dratted poochers," Mrs. Aggett exclaimed, with great relief; "and welcome a' be to all thic rubbish."

However, when the master came to look, he found that a little bag of tithes was gone, containing about £40 in gold, which he seemed to himself to have hidden right cunningly, in a hole of his bed-room wall, behind the barometer; which every one was afraid of, as a piece of wicked witchment. Like a sensible man, he was vexed to lose his money, although he had plenty more that could not be stolen; but remembering at once, that his meaning had been to spend most of this in charity, he perceived that his charity must be curtailed. But before he was much consoled by this, he came upon a dearer loss, which taxed his finest feelings.

His grandfather, Admiral Short, had been a person of great punctuality, timing all his movements by a large gold watch, and thereby measuring the minutes needful to defeat the enemy. He was called "Punctuality Short"; because in a contest of some

celebrity, he had said, "we shall have her in twenty-five minutes;" then holding his watch, with the going side outwards, upon a nice round abdomen, he worked his guns to such effect, that she struck in 24 minutes 30 seconds. And when he discharged, with punctuality also, no more guns, but the peaceful debt of nature, his last words were, "my grandson Tom is to have the Victory chronometer." A chronometer it was, and beat that of the ship; though portable watches were content, as yet, to be called "watches," and no more.

Finding his money flown, the parson hurried to the case in which he kept this triumph of the Barwise firm. By it he had the church-clock set; and by it (whatever the church-clock said) he had the bells rung on a Sunday morning, to tell the parish when eight o'clock was; for the women (who always got up first on a Sunday) to put their husbands' clothes out, and for the little girls to soap their brothers, and for the barber—having fifty long beards to hew down, between that and ten o'clock—to pour his boiling water on his dish of suds, and set off to do the halfpenny fellows first. For, as many of the men as paid a penny, got another good hour to stretch their arms.

There were perhaps a thousand things, of almost equal moment, for which this big watch struck the spring—or, if that expression be an involution, awoke the time of day for Christowell. But what is the use of detailing them, when the watch, and all its works, were gone?

It is a remarkable instance of the overpowering effect of great catastrophes, that when Mr. Short found his true Palladium conspicuous by its absence, the only thing he did was, to double his fists unwittingly, and the only thing he said was—"What a bad job!"

"Hath a' tuk the kay along wi' 'un? Ay, that a' hath!" cried Mrs. Aggett, with some admiration, as she came up, to see what her master was about; "but the zeals be all here. Well, I said a' was a gentleman; though a' might be a black one."

This observation recalled Mr. Short's attention from the deed, to the doer thereof; and knowing—as a preacher has opportunity of doing—how soon the clearest impression will fade, he began at once to question his housekeeper, concerning her assailant. And it seemed to him almost to be an excess of her wonted peculiarities, when she charged the blame wholly, and solely, on himself, evincing goodwill, if not downright gratitude, to the man who had fastened her to the pump. The only description she could give, or would,

was that he seemed to be "a tall black gentleman, going about very graciously;" till the vicar at last lost his patience, and exclaimed, "you had better say I robbed my own house. Upon my word, I believe you think so!"

"Noo, noo, twadn't you," the good woman replied; "a' was dree times so tall as you be. 'Twor as much as the odds, atwixt thic, and thiccy." She held up her long middle finger, as she spoke, to indicate the robber gentleman; and then, as figurative of her master, displayed the top-joint of her dumpy thumb. Mr. Short strode away; for if anything annoyed him, it was an allusion to his modesty of stature.

"The poor old woman is so deaf," he pronounced, in a voice quite loud enough to reach her, "that the villain stole behind her, while she was at the sink; and I dare say she never set eyes on him at all. But Lizzie—Lizzie must know something. And Thomas! Good heavens! is a house to be surprised, and robbed in broad daylight, and the people burked, and gagged, and not a soul be able to tell anything about it? Lizzie, come here, child. You have had time enough to get over your fright, and to satisfy your hunger. Now what was this fellow like, that 'keyed' you in the sermon-room?"

"I can't say, sir, indeed I can't," Lizzie Aggett answered, beginning to whine at the remembrance of her fright; "only he was big, and black, and hugly. If you was to tear me in pieces with wild horses——"

"Tush!" cried the parson; "was there ever such a set of nincompoops? What became of Thomas, child? Is he in a trance? Was he scared off the premises? Did he see a vision?"

"No, sir, please, sir; leastwise not as I knows of. But he seed a half-crown, laying under the laylac, by the stable-door, sir. And he come to ouze, and he saith, 'I must go and see, whether this here be a good coin of the kingdom.' And please, sir, he ain't been back; though I hollered, like a peg bein' killed, out of windy."

"Ah, I understand. I shall have to groom *Trumpeter* myself; if he is to be groomed at all. Run, and see who is thumping at the back-door so."

But the girl trembled so, that the vicar went himself; and there he found the landlord's daughter from the *Three Horse-shoes*.

"Oh, do please to come, sir, as soon as you can," she held up her hands with urgency; "it isn't raining, anything to speak of now, sir. And your Thomas is that tipsy, in our bar, and laying about him with a pewter pot, that nobody dare go anigh him. We would

send for constable, if it wasn't for your reverence. But father saith to let you know, sir, first ; for fear you should take it unkind of us. Father could tackle of him peart enow ; if must be. But mother hold him back, by reason of the pewter pot. Your Thomas is a-laying about, so dreadful!"

"I wish he had layed about with equal vigour here," poor Mr. Short muttered, as he set forth again, without a bit of food, and with wet shivers running through him ; "bolt the door, Lizzie. Ah, I need not tell you ; 'when the horse is stolen,' etc. Don't be afraid, child. They won't come again ; for the most rational of all reasons. The Greeks had a proverb, about the great difficulty experienced, even by that most ingenious race, in skinning a skinned dog."

CHAPTER XXI.

VERY FINE IDEAS.

ACCORDING to many sound opinions—at variance with others almost as sound—the valley of the Teign, near Fingle Bridge, is the finest thing to look at, in the West of England. As in the vales of Lyn, or Barle, the rugged lines of Exmoor descend in grace ; so here, the sterner height, and strength, of Dartmoor fall into beauty, yet preserve their grandeur. The windings of the great hills, as they interwend each other, come down with sweet obeisance to the shelter of the valley. Their rounded heights are touched with yellow of scant grass, or grey of rock ; but under the bleak line, furze begins, and heather, and oak foliage. With rapid step, as must be down a pitch of such precipitance, the foliage slides from tone to tint, and deepens into darker green. But the play of lighter colours and the glimpse of silver stems enliven the verge of a shingled clearing, or birth of some fern-cradled rill. Deep in the wooded bottom quiver, like a clue of gossamer, sunny threads of the twisted river, wafted through the lifts of gloom.

All this is very fair to see, and thoroughly worthy to be talked of. But the special glory of the Fingle Vale, is the manifold sweep of noble curves, from the north, and from the south, by alternate law, descending ; overlapping one another, by the growth of distance, and holding up their haze, like breath that floats, to and fro, between them. These, with winding involution, and recessed embosoming, in fainter and fainter tones retire, to the distance where the hills are sky.

A scene of beauty had many days yet for keeping its rapture to itself; and echoes of solemnity had not learned to exclaim—"come here, Harry," and "oh lawks, Matilda!" Our good British race had not yet been driven, to pant up hill, and perspire down dale, for the sake of saying that they had done it. And people, afoot for their holidays, sought the renown of each place, in the larder.

Of this kind was Sir Joseph Touchwood; a man with no humbug about him, in any pursuit, except that of a contract. "Don't talk to me about your views," he said to his lady, who was picking up all the picturesque expressions; "they don't cost a penny; and they don't bring one in. I have seen some hundreds of them, and was none the wiser. Lazy folk may talk about them. I want my dinner."

"Julia, dear," began Lady Touchwood, who was always more affectionate, in the presence of papa; "do persuade your father, to come with us for once. It would do him so much good; and he must not always slave." The young lady looked at her father; and perceiving by his lips, that his mind was sternly set, was wise enough not to run the risk of failure.

"He knows best," she answered softly; "and perhaps his mind, instead of relaxing, would only be impatient, all the while. It is happy for us, not to have such a heavy sense of duty; and that he has it. But darling papa, will not object to our having a holiday, and asking a few friends."

"You may have all the world and his wife," said Sir Joseph, who was always cross, when hungry; "but no Champagne, mind; only the Saumur; unless Sir Robert Moneywig is quite sure to be there, and to bring his daughter, Chrysolite. After all I have done, and the style you live in, and the table you keep, when I am out of the way, it does seem a little too atrocious, that when I come home, I must keep awake till midnight, to amuse a lot of fellows, who have not got sixpence."

Lady Touchwood, although of fervent spirit, resolved to have it out with him by-and-by, hoping that her daughter would come forward now, and receive a little check to her impertinence. But Julia saw through that manœuvre.

"Do you know why that is, papa?" she asked, with a smile sweetly void of satire. "It is because you are too good-natured, and so extremely amusing. Of course, we all do our best; but still, none of us can talk as you do."

"You have not been through such things as I have," replied Sir Joseph, who could talk of nothing, except the weather, and the

price of corn and leather; "if you had, with your abilities, my dear, you could describe almost anything. Oh, dinner is up, is it? And high time too. If Master Richard appears, just tell him, he may go to the pantry; he shall not come in to us. There shall be punctuality in my house. When I was a boy—oh dear! oh dear!"

"Hush!" said Lady Touchwood—or at least she "breathed it," according to the fashion of expression now. Too often, Sir Joseph would flout the stately air of his "princely apartments," with sudden reminiscence of the days when he was hungry, and the things he enjoyed with his apron on. His daughter always laughed, and said, "do tell us more;" but his wife, as a matter of duty, quenched it.

"Now I do not wish you to misunderstand me," this strong-minded baronet took care to say; when the dinner was over, and he began to spy about (in a full frame of mind) for his pipe, and round chair, and the clearance of the women; "what I said was plain enough. If you are certain, that Sir Robert means to be with you, take half a dozen of the very dry champagne, and for the girls the sweeter stuff. No Saumur; I would not have it said; and the name is on the corks, confound them! I heard of it once; when I myself took the labels off the bottles. An idiot said—but I will not spoil my pipe. Under any circumstances, take champagne. Julia will count, how much there is. But open no 'Extra Sec,' until you see Sir Robert, and his daughter, with those wretched old screws they keep. Mind, I wish things to be done handsomely, and in accordance with my reputation; if anybody comes at all, who is capable of judging."

"All shall be done, to the very utmost of my poor ability," his daughter replied, as she rose to fetch his pipe, and the ancient brass tobacco-box, which had cost him a penny, when pence were scarce. Then she drew towards the fire his favourite chair; for a fire was still a comfort, and however grand the room might be, where he dined, there he would have his pipe, and in no other chair but that. Cushions, and sloping backs, he hated, but loved this old ashen seat, which was not even polished, but closely railed round the back, and cupped in the centre, and supported by six substantial legs.

Whatever might be said against Sir Joseph, his bitterest enemy, or the man who got the worst of him, could scarcely describe him as a "stuck-up cad;" for his common sense kept him from that disgrace. His "social duties"—as his wife and daughter called them—were the greatest pest of his life. He felt that he had earned, as well as needed, his nap on a Saturday eve, and his curtained pew on Sunday, and the bliss of not having to listen, while people

talked of things, that concerned him not. Yet, with the vigour, which had led him to success, and the patience which confirmed it, he was ready to go into his best clothes often, and show the hospitality, for which the West was famous.

But his strong sense of duty failed to carry him into this "Gipseying;" as outdoor parties away from home were called, in that more simple time. The money, and provisions, he would furnish, when convinced that other wealthy people had to do the like, and when allowed to grumble without any contradiction. Outside his own desk, it was his chief ambition to settle his daughter Julia well, for he was really proud, as well as truly fond of Julia. And to hear that she had enjoyed herself, and made a good figure among rich people, and to receive a grateful kiss from her brightly smiling lips, was very nearly as good to him, as a sounder investment of the cash. Therefore, when he got his pipe, that evening, he said that they might go as far as five and twenty guineas; so long as they bothered him no more about it.

Miss Touchwood at once resolved, in private, to stick at nothing short of fifty guineas, if she could manage to spend so much; for she wished to make a stir in the neighbourhood, and arouse a spirit of lively competition. And she managed to persuade her dear papa, that this noble scheme would at once release him, from giving grand dinners, for a month to come, and also relieve him from the great-gunned assault, setting in upon the most sacred arches of his cellar. For a canon of Exeter had discovered (Providentially, as he told his wife, who said—yes, that was the proper word; for his dear constitution required a fillip) that, in the cellar at Touchwood Park, lingered still a ruby shadow of the finest vintage ever known, upon the Alto Douro,—the finest, but the scantiest, when the grapes were trodden by the war-horse. It was a wine distinctly placed far above the range of lay understanding; and the canon (though strongly adjured by Mrs. Botrys, to confine his discovery to his own bosom) in a genial discussion of some bottles of his own, with a brother canon, and a prebendary, frankly referred to that loftier standard; and a meeting of the Chapter was held, next day.

"You may still save some of that dry old stuff, from the even dryer people who come after it," with such words Julia consoled her father; "by giving these gipseyings, instead of dinner-parties. Even a canon cannot expect port, so early in the day, even if it bore the carriage; and they don't know anything about champagne. Papa, you might get a lot at an auction, or smuggled, at about a pound a dozen. Nobody would suspect you, and nothing could be fairer.

The Government try to cheat you always; and you have a right to cheat the Government."

"Julia," said Sir Joseph, with a deep interior twinkle, which might have been interpreted—'instruct your grandfather in the suction of gallinaceous products;' "my daughter, it is better not to say such things, even without meaning them. Persons, not conversant with my career, and slow-mouthed at making, or taking a joke, would misunderstand you, and stare, and talk about it; whereas, if there is one rule of the very highest principle, it is to have no words about a contract, made for the nation's good, and carried out with energy. I have a bin of very ancient Hock, possibly a little beyond its prime. The sourer it is, the more the clever people smack their lips. Work it off first, my dear; you know some words of German; nobody else does, and it will prove your schooling Half a pinch of snuff; and then the chair to put my legs up."

The lady of the house was not best pleased with her daughter for coming forward so. "What do you know about such things?' she asked. "If you take any more upon yourself, you may take all I shall stay at home; and you may put all the invitations in your own name. No doubt that would be the proper thing to do, according to the style the chits of girls are now introducing, from America Don't say another word. I won't go."

This was rather awkward; but the clever girl got over it, and smoothed down her mother, to sweet interest in the matter. And the most delicious invitations, such as ladies alone can write, convinced everybody who received one, that the whole success of a daring enterprise hung upon his, or her, acceptance. And more than that, everybody wanted to be there.

"Oh I do wish that I could go," cried Rose, running with a letter into "Naboth's Vineyard," as she wickedly called the last hobby of the captain, because she had not the free run of it; "it is such a glorious idea, father dear! And to think of my getting such a sweet invitation! All of it is done to please you, of course. But I know how hard you are, to please."

"And how easy to displease," her father answered smiling, with his thoughtful face rather red from stooping; "an Ogre, a Draco, a child-devouring Saturn. Show me this honeyed invitation, Rosie, that my malice may find an outlet. By the Poles, how affectionate the lady is! 'Darling Rose!' Whose darling are you?"

"Papa, I am so glad, whenever you are jealous. But read on. Do be fair for once."

"'Darling Rose,'" read Mr. Arthur, with well-feigned wrath,

well softened off; "'for *really* your kindness to my *dear son* compels me to cast off formality—will you do us yet *another favour?* In the quietest of all quiet ways, and with one or two *delightful people* coming, chiefly dignitaries of the Church, we are going to that *most romantic* spot, Fingle Bridge, next Thursday. We propose to do nothing more than *look about*, with an interval of mild refreshment. It has been said that we should refresh our taste for the *grand and the beautiful*, more often than we do. I scarcely understand what such things mean; but *I feel*, when they tell me, that I am *bound* to do it. If *Captain Arthur* could be induced, by any sense of duty, to join us, how he would *enhance* our pleasure, and be able to explain, to the reverend gentlemen, the names of the trees, etc.! But that, I fear, is a *hopeless thing*. Only do coax him, for I am quite sure that you *can coax* irresistibly, to let *you* come to this *most secluded* party; and a carriage with a lady-friend of yours inside it, Miss Perperaps, the daughter of the doctor, will be ready for you, at your *private gate*, at *ten o'clock on Thursday*. Ever gratefully, and truly yours, Mariana Touchwood.'" Her church-name was 'Mary Anne.'

"Now it is a pretty letter, and full of generosity," Rose exclaimed, with the fervour of bright youth; "and so kind of them, too, to invite Sporetta. I like Sporetta, she is so straightforward; and if she had been at a good school she would have been the cleverest girl you can conceive. Oh, how I do wish, I could go!"

"Stop! Here is a postscript about your friend. 'We have not asked Spotty yet, and do not mean to do so, unless we hear that you will join us. Julia Touchwood.' What do you say to that, my child?"

"Well, I think that whoever put that in must be candid, and truthful, but not very nice. Miss Touchwood is a very great beauty, I believe; but I don't think I should like her. As regards Master Dicky, they owe poor Spotty, at least a hundred times as much, as they owe me. And they should have invited her, first of all. I don't care at all about going now, among such ungrateful people."

"You are a most hot-headed little creature," Mr. Arthur answered, though his smile undid his censure; "but look at it in another way, my dear. Possibly Miss Perperaps longs to go most awfully (according to the phrase they all use now, but which I especially object to), and if you decline, you destroy her chance."

"But, papa, I was sure that you would never let me go."

"Oh then, that was why the grapes were sour! My darling, I cannot bear to rob you of every enjoyment, for the short time such

enjoyment lasts. You have never seen the loveliest spot round Dartmoor ; and I think that you ought to go, for your friend's sake. Neither of you has much change of scene, or chance of harmless pleasure. I particularly wish you to go, my Rosie."

Filial duty was her strongest point, and she could not bear to ask for money. Her father also, being light of cash, and a man of rather lofty temperament, took a large and distant view of the things belonging to the outward female, and too often absorbing the inward one. Now and again, he would give her a bit of something to match with her sweet pretty self, and he praised the results of her own handiwork ; but a good round sum, to go to Exeter, and sit down with, on one of those wondrous high shop-stools, was not beyond his compass only, but wholly in the vacant distance of imagination. The subject demands even less to be touched with extremest reservation, than to be run away from, by people who have not studied it. And the safest thing is to quote feminine verdict, in a question for female jury.

"Lor a mussy," Mrs. Pugsley cried, when the young lady went through a process of careening, after the accident at Moreton ; "Tim, her hathn't got a hook and eye, about her !"

Husbands, in a great degree, fathers, in a greater one, are well content with their own contentment ; the which is a saving virtue. "Gew-gaws utterly spoil your appearance," they declare right nobly ; "take my word for it, my darling, that nothing could improve you." But the darling likes to take other words as well, and is reasonable in doing so ; while they all despise extravagance.

"Father has stumped up a five pound note. I knew where it was, and I gave him no peace," said Spotty to Rose, while there yet was time to make up things, if you could only get them. "What do you think, I said to him, dear, when he took the key out of his box, with a bang? And I knew very well who put him up to it. She is in such a way about not being asked, that I only get cheese-rinds for supper, ever since. I said, 'Very well ; it is no concern of mine. I don't care twopence how I look. I shall go with Dicky Touchwood's bandages on. They came from the valends of our broken down bedstead. And there is quite a beautiful fringe to them. Starched up, and plaited, they will look quite grand. And perhaps Master Dicky will not recognise them. If he does, he will know they are in the bill.' I wish you could have seen my dear parent's face. But I am very glad you did not hear what he said. How much is the captain going to stump up ?"

"My father has a very large mind," said Rose, who could not

help laughing, though sadly shocked; "I never dream of speaking to him in such a manner."

"They have all got large minds, to save their pockets," answered the impious Sporetta; "but you can't go, in anything you have got. Tell the captain, you will go with your night-gown on."

"Miss Perperaps, if you talk so coarsely, I shall decline to go with you."

"Very well. Go in sack-cloth and ashes. I will sit on the box, and leave you all the inside. That stuck-up Julia will be delighted, to see you look such a perfect fright. She knows you are ten times prettier than she is. And she is after some young fellow, who dotes on you. Oh my! Wouldn't I try to cut her out, if the Lord had made me handsome?"

Miss Arthur did her utmost to repel such low ideas; and she would not even deign to ask, about any gentleman, called "a young fellow." Without any arrogance, and purely from her own distinct ideas of right, and wrong—which come down, in questions of behaviour, to be called good manners, and bad manners—she had found that Spotty Perperaps did not suit her. And no low taunts, about being a frump, or a dowdy, had any effect upon her mind, whenever she brought it up strictly to the question.

"Come down, Rosie, here is a box for you," her father shouted up the stairs one day, when she was doing Arachnoid work, in the quarters of a Sunday frock, that suffer most from piety; "tenpence to pay, and you to pay it; and Master Pugsley vows that he can't afford to book it. Hunt up your purse, and come down, and pay; if you will do things so recklessly."

"I have not got tenpence in the world," cried Rose; "how very unkind it is of people! It must be the old books, I left behind; and I am sure they are not worth tenpence. But I have got fourpence, if you can only manage to lend me sixpence till next time."

"What a fine expression!" Mr. Arthur answered, looking up the stairs impatiently; for he enjoyed, like a child, the assault of pleasure; "when will next time be? Come down, and have it out with the carrier."

"Niver you be in a hoory, Missy," Pugsley advised, in his leisurely way. "I be allays in a hoory, and my life gooth out o' me, by rason of dooty; but you be young. It's Pugsley here, and Pugsley there, till there bain't a button of me left, to answer. Lor, if I wor to go and cut a cord like that—wutt be you about, Miss Rosie? There have been gunpooder, at the tail of Teddy."

"That makes him go so fast, I suppose," said Rosie, who was

getting much excited by this time; "my scissors won't go through this cord. I am not going to pay tenpence for nothing; and you may take it back, and try to get twenty pence, at the other end. That is the law of it, about the letters."

"Her dothn't know nort about the law; no more nor I do. Please to pay up the tenpence, Missy. I be vast to-day, I be." The carrier favoured the captain with a wink.

"The only way you can be fast," she answered, "is when you stick fast; as you did the other day. What makes you in such a dreadful hurry now? You shall have the tenpence, if the things are worth it."

"Many's the time it hath been my lot," Master Pugsley went on heavily, "to carr' tuppence-worth, and have to ax tew shillin'—presents and sichlike, from rich folk to poor ones. But carryer must have 's money, all the zame, whether a' bringeth good vally, or no. Please goo, and vetch the tenpence, Missy. Teddy can't baide no longer."

"I never knew you show such a mean, greedy, avaricious spirit. Oh, I beg your pardon, heartily, and humbly! I had no idea that you could play a part so well."

Master Pugsley exploded, as none can explode, but a Devonshire man, who has corked himself down, and corded his cork on a joke of his own brewing, mellow, well-seasoned, and full of body. "Wull'e strike, agin' paying the tenpence now?" he asked, with the tears of laughter reddening on his cheeks, from the purple ground they ran upon; though a fine sense of humour would have scarcely bred a smile, out of that common material, surprise. But Rose, instead of joining in his laugh, was hard put, not to burst into tears; such a power of shame arose, through her delight; because she had been cross at pure kindness.

"I am very sorry—it was all your fault. I never saw anything so lovely, in my life. Oh, father, you must have spent a hundred pounds! I don't deserve a thread of it. Do let them take it back. It is only fit for some great Princess."

"It is fit for you, my child, and you for it. Or at any rate, I hope, the things will fit you. I had not the least idea, in my stupid way, that you were so badly off for clothes. But good Mrs. Pugsley has enlightened me; and your kind school-mistress managed all the rest. So now run away. Let Moggy take the box up; and by-and-by, come and show me, how you look."

CHAPTER XXII.

GIPSEYING DAY.

It is too hard upon a quiet little village (where everybody knows, twice a day, how everybody else's cough is; and scarcely can the most industrious woman find anything to say, that she has not said thrice) suddenly to be swept off its legs, by a hurricane, a water-spout, an earthquake, and a thunderbolt, all coming down upon it, in one clap. To say, that Christowell suffered all these things at once, would be scarcely true perhaps, at any rate for the present; although they were soon to come bodily. But even now a heavy strain was put on the constitution of society; and folk who had scarcely had a thing to talk of, going on now for a twelvemonth (except the Post-office, and its insolence), were now flung into this deeper pit—that they did not know, what to talk of first. Who can deny, that this is by far the more dangerous of the two extremes?

There are, in history, periods when the popular verdict is of value; but these are of very rare occurrence, and are not to be forced, by most dexterous use of the powerful implement of Samson. Good men may be knocked down, by that, and bad ones hoisted into their seats, and the rogues prevail, by the prevalence of fools. But, upon the heels of pale ignominy, ruddy dignity returns at last; and the nation pays cheerfully an enormous price, for recovering the power of blushing. Because it feels itself, to be again a nation.

Not far otherwise, at Christowell, faction (headed by the cobbler, tailed by the tailor, and stomached by the tripeman) had wriggled up a wretched little insurrection, against faith, honour, and dignity. But no sooner had the people seen what such things led to, by the insolent robbery of the vicarage, and the cording and colandering of a female (whose tongue was universally respected), than a wholesome, and hearty revulsion ensued. Trickey, (who had long ago been waxing over-haughty, and vamping himself up, with office, and stamping on the young Queen's head, destroying of her picture,) had aided, and abetted the felony, to the utmost of his power, by delivering the letter, which alone had prevented the parson from shooting the perpetrator. The tripeman, in spite of all the rain, had been out with his dog-cart; and that looked bad. And though the tailor had stayed at home, he knew best what his reason was. As soon as the planks across the water (which the flood had

washed away,) were replaced, unanimous opinion met upon them; and the men sat down, to let the women use their voices. And by such means, everything became so clear, and the merits of the vicar so victorious, that if any of the three anti-clerics had been up to "Malicious height"—which has since come down—the constable in the next parish but one, who went to Petty Sessions, would have heard of it.

Even as no man can be looked at, without having knowledge of it—though it be but the spinal seam of his coat, that receives the impact—so these three men, before any of the others had smoked a pipe, perceived the feeling in the air about them. They met together, and then came out, laying aside all sense of rank, and even of money owing to them, in their strong indignant manhood; which grew more indignant, as conscious debtors grew more determined not to see them. Suppressing successfully all sentiments of cash, they addressed the public, which already was ashamed; for the three men had their best coats on; and what they said, was to the purpose, and without a wasted word.

"Dothn't Mother Aggett zay, 'twor a gentleman, as dooed it?"

"Her doth; her doth. Her be zure of that," the public, from all its planks, replied.

"And hath Mother Aggett had oppurtoonity, to jidge of a gentleman, when her zees 'un?"

"Ay, that her hath. Her hath a' been in vaine vam'lies, let alone Passon Shart's."

"Well then, doth ere a wan of us dree zim laikely to be taken for a gentleman? Spak the Lord's truth, and no lies now."

"Never a wan of 'e; by a blaind man, nor a deaf 'un; lave alone a 'ooman, as hath lived in vam'lies."

Without another syllable, of reasoning or reproof, the cobbler, the tailor, and the tripeman turned, and marched all abreast to the *Three Horse-shoes;* and shame alone stopped their calumniators, from hastening after them, to drink their health.

But this episode, instead of allaying, served only to enlarge the ferment; and the scores of rumours, that took wing daily, proved—if such a thing requires proving—that the slow mind is the most inventive. All, however, was invention; without a stroke of discovery; even though there were as yet no police, round Dartmoor, to handcuff discovery. And Mr. Short, in his brief way, said that detection is like dining; if a man wants it done, he must do it for himself.

In this fine spirit, he resolved to go, though most people said that

he ought to stop at home, to the party of distinguished gipseys, about to encamp at Fingle Bridge. "A vast amount of chaff must be met somehow," he thought, with a knowledge of that material, partly derived from his dealings therein; "and I had better meet it in the lump. They will shoot their brilliant flight so thick, as to knock one another out of aim. I shall fail to understand them; till they explain their jokes. And a joke expounded, is a joke confounded. And it will be a treat, worth a lot of heavy banter, to see Rose, and Julia, meet."

Discharging his duty still, as parson of the parish, he had been to see Miss Arthur's new apparel; a foretaste of which had astonished him in church. And superficial though his learning was, in matters of that high nature, or art, he had contrived to give, as well as to find, a refreshment of soft pleasure. For the maiden's innocent delight (not only in comely, and tasteful attire, but also in her own fitness for it, and above all, in her father's loving kindness) was enough to please any but a very churlish person, and to tempt forth many a smile of praise. Captain Larks looked on, with resignation; having heard the same things said, fifty times now, and making his mind up to complain of tautology, when he had heard them a hundred times.

"Suppose, it should be a most lovely morning, as lovely as even this *lilict* of something," said Mr. Short, while Rose turned round, to escape a tea-leaf on the carpet; "and then when everybody is up on the hill, where there is not a furze-bush for umbrella—one of our Dartmoor storms comes on."

"Oh, Mr. Short, you have sent such a shiver—I mean, you have startled me so sadly. And you are always right, about the weather. Please to say, that you do not mean it."

"Far be it from me to foretell such woes: I never pretend to know anything, about the character of the day after to-morrow. Even to-morrow has beaten me now; for I never expected that day of deluge, when my little house was robbed. But somebody else did, and made a fine thing of his weather-lore. Whoever it was, he foresaw a great rain; for the letter was posted the day before, and he knew that my house would have no one near it; he sent me away, and the place was at his mercy. He knew more of the weather, than I do."

"That alone ought to supply some clue," Mr. Arthur broke in upon their lighter talk; "or at any rate, it restricts your search. It must be some fellow, almost living on the moor, and out of doors perpetually, who can beat you and me, in the weather signs. I know

them pretty well; you know them better; but the weather beat both of us that day. I would have bet ten to one, especially after the way I saw the trout rise, that the day would be fine; but now I remember,—yes, I saw some worms expecting; and a frog had got his hind-legs crossed."

"When the tadpoles go up and down——" said Rose. "But who are we, or who are they, to beat all men of the loftiest science, with centuries of instruments to help them? It seems too bad, that——"

"You had better wait, my darling," Mr. Arthur said, for fear of her turn of mind becoming scientific—the uttermost disaster that can befall a female; and Rose was already beginning to know a barometer from a thermometer, and the north-east wind from the south-west; "my Rose, you had better wait a little, and consult the tadpoles, instead of Mr. Short."

"The tadpoles know a great deal more than I do," the vicar acknowledged, with the candour of a man, who has been mistaken lately; "but they turn to croakers; and I will not. Let us hope for weather, as lovely as all the pretty things, that will be there."

When the day came, there were many pretty things "come to see, and to be seen"—according to one of those grand "examples," which abide in the mind, when the rule is lost, in the dissolution of syntax. But though a round dozen—and round they were—of Devonshire beauties came to the scratch (to adopt Mr. Short's low metaphor), all, except every single one of them in private, confessed that they were only fit to hold a candle, to Julia Touchwood, and Rose Arthur. Upon such a question, a good bold statement is better than elaborate description. And, as to the palm betwixt those twain, Julia was sure that she ought to have it, but wanted to get her opinion confirmed; while Rose, without dreaming of any competition, admired Miss Touchwood's dress, very, very candidly.

When they met, in a beautiful path of the wood, with the officious Dicky fetching them, there really was a nice piece of manners, as well as a pretty interview. Either had heard of the other so much, and formed such imaginary portraits, that both were a little excited; but one thought it wise to conceal that condition; while the other never thought about it.

Julia Touchwood had long intended to be "garbed with simplicity," at this feast of nature; or as our best authorities express it, to be "dressed with studious plainness." But her mother, with the eagle-eye of the superior sex, had found a hole in this, or made one. "You want to look, as if you were not come out. You

may try that, after thirty; but at your age, you should try to look older."

"I shall suit myself," the young lady replied; and truly she had done it. She was just in that interval of the ages—if such an interval there be—when the velvety half of the human race take superior views of apparel. Therefore, it was not to please herself, but others, that she had a new costume from Paris imported by her father, and so refulgent, that the custom-house people winked every eye.

"How charming it is to discover you, at last!" Miss Touchwood exclaimed to the sweet simple Rose, as if she had lit upon a flower in a hedge-row. "You have been so wonderfully kind to my dear brother! Dicky, be off. We want to talk." Dicky made a face, and desired to stop. But the weight was against him, and he had to go.

"But I have always been at home," said Rose, as quiet, and truthful, as her pearl-grey dress, which was of some material unknown to Julia, soft, and supple, and of mild sub-lustre, yet void of shrinking, and fast not to run; "I have always been at home, Miss Touchwood; except on the day, when you happened to call upon us. And you understood, that I could not call on you."

"I did not expect you; and that makes it all the kinder, on your part, to be with us to-day. I hope to introduce you to some very famous people. Their names might frighten you; but when you come to talk to them, they scarcely seem to know anything at all; or if they do, they keep it very close. I always expect to be amused. Don't you?"

"I have never thought about it, in that kind of way. It is so seldom that I go from home. And at home I have so many things to do. If you will kindly allow me, I shall be much happier, without being introduced. There are several people whom I know here; quite enough to keep me from feeling lonely. And this place is so lovely, that it seems a shame to talk."

"Why that was the principal thing we came for," Miss Touchwood answered, with a lively smile; "but you shall do just as you like; unless the bishop comes, as he half promised to do, if his many engagements allowed it. If he does, you must be presented to him; because it is lucky for young people."

"Oh, I know the bishop very well indeed; he has always been most kind to me. If he comes, I shall go at once, and see him."

Julia, with all her good manners, could not help looking, and almost expressing, her surprise; while Rose coloured deeply, not

because of the bishop, but through fear that she might have spoken rashly.

"She has told a great fib," was Miss Touchwood's inference, sped by her sense of a small one of her own; for she knew that the bishop could not come, and fancied that Rose might know it too. However, she only said, "Oh, you know him? How delightful he is, when he likes to be! And he does love trout. Have you heard of my clever brother Richard's scheme? A diversion, in the best sense of the word. Mr. Short is in such a fume about it! Has Dicky told you? He is in such glory!"

"He is full of ideas," said Rose most gravely; at which the other laughed most merrily. "Yes, he is indeed; when he could not shake his foot, he spent most of his time in inventing."

"No wonder he talks about you so much, because of your noble faith in him. He has invented one thing, I believe, the only thing he ever will invent; and that is perpetual motion. What a plague he must have been to you! He wears me out of my wits sometimes, even when he ought to be as tired as a pack-horse. But his present invention is not his own, or at least it seems much too good for him. It certainly is a very fine idea; for it helps on the day, at so many turns. He wanted to bring fifty terriers here, and treat all the canons to a rat-hunt; but of course we would not hear of that. So he struck out this new light, which promises much excitement. People call him stupid; but I do not. If he were stupid, could he get at least fifty rough men to admire him, and to obey his orders?"

"He has an extraordinary gift of being liked," said Rose, with a smile, for she liked him herself; "especially with the labouring men. Our man, Samuel Slowbury, very rarely indeed is wide awake. But your brother formed a friendship—I beg your pardon, an acquaintance with him; and Sam can scarcely sleep, if 'Squire Dicky's' name is mentioned."

"Just so; that is the state of feeling in our house, and round it. And he has taken advantage of it, to order his army in this direction. At the hoisting of a flag where the two paths meet, at least five-and-twenty men are to descend from Cranbrook Castle, where they keep their beer, with shovels, and two-bills, and all that, on their shoulders. And nobody is to know what they are to do, until they have done it, and the result is ours. I hope I have roused your curiosity. But if you meet Mr. Short, try not to ask him; for he thinks it a hundredfold worse than the lashing of his Mrs. Aggett to the stake—I mean the pump. I must run away now; but I shall

look for you again ; and don't forget your promise about the bishop. I shall send some one, to keep you in view. You have got your sketch-book ; I shall claim one."

Rose, being left to herself, or at least with none but strangers sauntering near, turned up a steep and zigzag path, which seemed likely to lead to a fine view up the valley. Here she was obliged to be very careful, as her pretty dress was in frequent peril ; but without mishap, she gained a corner, where a glorious opening shone. At the just height, and the proper turn, to catch the long avenue of winding vale, a grassy knoll gave standing-place, and the obstruction of the wood sank down into copse, that only paved the foreground. With a short breath of wonder, and a long one of delight, Rose stopped, and sat down by a low whortle-bush, with a pink frill still adorning it. Before her were folded, and unfolded, the long hazy windings of the Fingle vale, the loveliest view that had ever filled her eyes. The perfection of beauty made her sad ; she threw down her useless drawing-book, and hung upon the turn of thought for tears.

Suddenly vigorous steps came near, firm steps that sounded not unknown ; and before she had time to look bright and thoughtless, a young man was gazing at her, with profound surprise. Good manners told him haply not to notice her confusion ; but love, and love's sympathy, got the better of good manners, or in nature bettered them. Without formality, he took her hand, as if she wanted caring for.

"Why are you sitting like this, all alone? And with tears in your eyes! Have any of those stupid people dared to be rude to you? Or has that poor little Hop o' my Thumb——"

"No, he has been very good," she answered, forgetting that she should have asked, who was meant. "I am as happy as possible here. Every one has been most kind to me. I did not expect to see you, Mr. Westcombe."

"And I scarcely hoped that you would be here. I knew that you had been invited, but—well, I came in the forlorn hope of it. Is your good father here? I fear not, because you are never far apart."

"No, there was no chance of his coming. If he went out once, he would have to go always, because everybody likes him so. Lady Touchwood would have been more delighted than she could describe, as she very kindly told me ; but it was useless to think of such a thing. Now wasn't it kind of him, to let me come?"

"That it was ; especially to me. You know, your father is always most kind to me. And he told me, that he liked me."

"Are you sure that he did that? It does not sound like his way

at all. I never knew him say that to anybody." Rose looked up doubtfully; but Jack was sure about it.

"You must not tell him that I boasted of it, because he would think me so conceited; and perhaps it would set his mind against me; which I do hope you would never try to do. I never yet saw any one I liked so much—I mean of course counting up the gentlemen I know, and leaving out the ladies—as your dear father, my dear Miss Arthur. And he certainly felt some good-will towards me; though not to be spoken of,—I mean, not to compare with my intense admiration, and affection for him."

"But you have only seen him once!" said Rose, looking as if her father ought to produce these grand impressions at a glance, but did not always do so; "how can you have managed to understand him so entirely?"

"Because the gift runs in our family," he answered, with the vigour which comes of believing a thing. "My father has got it twice as much as I have, because he has seen so much more of the world. He is down the hill now. He finds his legs a little stiff. He has been a good deal shot about, and bayonetted in three places. But he wants to come up, if there is anything to see; and he sent me on first, to make sure of it. Please to stay here, just where you are; and look like yourself, when he comes up; I will have him here, before you have time to think about him. It takes a long time to think about him."

"How fond he does seem to be of his father! And how much he admires mine!" thought Rose; "it is a very rare thing, they say, to meet with such high principles now."

Not only did this young man now take stand on a very high level of principle, but he carried out with vigour filial duty, and helped his father up the hill. Almost before Miss Arthur could get into a nice indifferent state, and absorb her mind upon the landscape, John Westcombe came into view again, with one end of a long stick in both hands, and his dear father's hat at the other end rising. "Stiff work, stiff work; don't pull too hard. It is worse than any Spanish mountain," the elder gentleman panted forth; "don't be in such a hurry, my dear Jack. We have got all the day before us."

"Allow me to introduce," said Jack, excited beyond all filial bounds, "my dear father, Colonel Westcombe. Miss Arthur, this is Colonel Westcombe!"

"Lugged in at the utmost disadvantage," said the colonel, labouring to make a flourish. "But, bless my heart, I know you, my dear! Shake hands, while I think how I came to know you."

"I am certain," said Rose, with her bright blushing smile, as he took both her hands, and admired her, "that if I had ever met you before, sir, I should not have forgotten you."

"And yet I have forgotten you? Well put! That would be a disgrace to me. No; I suppose it was but a fancy. My memory begins to play me tricks. But if I do not know your face, I know its expression; and it does me good. It does me good to look at you, my dear, and to think of the days when I was young. There are very few lovely faces now. The young ladies are so pert, and forward; and that spoils the prettiest face in the world. Have you been drawing? And may we see it?"

"No; I could not even tell where to begin. I can only draw a barn, or a linhay, or a stile; great distance, and grandeur, are beyond me altogether. I know what I can do; and what I can't."

"Then," replied the colonel, who rejoiced in common sense, "you know the most important thing, there is for us to know. It is just what the young ladies never seem to know now; nor even the old gentlemen. I am very much afraid my son will tell you, that I don't, for one. As for him, he does not know what he can do; and he is too bashful to find out."

"I like to hear my father talk," said Jack; who had been observing, with intense delight, the conquest of the colonel, by the maiden of his love; "he positively hates conceit, and no one can have less of it than he has. Yet one of the foremost objects of his life, seems to be—to make me conceited!"

"We must not trouble you, at first sight," his father said to Rose very gravely, meaning thereby to rebuke his son, for intruding family politics, though himself had set the example; "with such little discussions, as we have at home. When we have the honour of knowing you better, there will be time enough for that. But why are you sitting here all alone? Has any jealousy on Julia's part—I mean have they contrived, for some young ladies are not entirely above all tricks, to put you aside, to shelf you—as we say, with any one no longer wanted?"

"Quite the contrary. I ran away. I am so accustomed to be alone. A crowd of strangers bewilders me. I have scarcely begun to enjoy this view yet. Have you ever seen anything more beautiful?"

"Never; at least of its own special kind. But we are interfering with your enjoyment. It was not my fault, it was my son's; though I must not blame him, for so pleasant a surprise. But promise me one thing, if you are not engaged, allow me to take care of you, when

we meet, by-and-by. I don't know what the arrangements are. But after the great engineering scheme, the fires will be lighted, and some cookery ensue. I mean, if the rain should have the manners to keep off. My old friend, Short, says that it will pour before six o'clock; and he is nearly always right. We must hope for the best. What would all the ladies do?"

Rose promised gladly to place herself in such good care; and upon that pledge they left her, and returned to the gay folk in the valley.

"Now you understand why I brought you up," John Westcombe said, as they were going down the hill. "That is the young lady, I mean to marry; that is to say, if I can. If I don't, I shall marry nobody."

"I never heard you speak like that before, and I think you might have asked my leave, or (if that is out of date) my opinion at least," his father replied, rather sharply for him. "You remind me of our great commander. She is a very sweet and charming girl. But I must know a great deal more about her. How did you make her acquaintance, my boy?"

Jack told him all about it, and all that he could tell, without breaking his pledge to Mr. Arthur; and the colonel's brave eyes shone with softness, when he heard of what Rose had done. "A noble girl! A most noble girl! I am not surprised at your infatuation, Jack," he exclaimed as he shook his son's hand again; "but you must not be in such a hurry. Such maidens are not to be won in a moment. Moreover, I must know more about her, or at any rate about her father. Keep out of sight, for the rest of the day; and leave her to me entirely. I shall manage better than you would."

This arrangement was not at all to the liking of the younger gentleman; but he could not oppose it with any good grace, when his father had just been so kind to him. But before he had time to think much about that, or make any promise about it, a great patch of yellow was seen betwixt the branches; waving and flapping, over Fingle Bridge. "It must be a flag of 'keep away,' as we used to call it," said the old soldier to his son; "perhaps there are gipseys there, and small-pox."

"No, it is a flag of 'come on;' a signal for the men on the hill, and for us to assemble. The 'great piece of sport,' as Dicky Touchwood calls it, or, as Mr. Short describes it, 'the atrocious bit of poaching,' is now to come off, for our enjoyment. That flag is the handkerchief of Canon Botrys, a bandana as large as a table-

cloth. He is famous for them, and for his knowledge of port wine."

Colonel Westcombe felt a deep interest in this, for he always liked to follow up such questions, and had often heard of Canon Botrys. "He deserves, then, to fly his own flag," said he.

But no time remained for discussion of the canon's merits, or of even more important subjects; for spectacle, and action, at short notice, took the place of dialogue.

"You are not to go, until they have begun. I beg of you, ladies, to be good enough to keep back; you will be in the way, and get frightfully splashed," Dicky Touchwood was shouting, again and again; but the ladies were determined to be in good time, and were zealously hurrying one another. For Dicky had been too proud of his scheme, to keep his own counsel about it.

"If you will only wait a quarter of an hour," he cried in despair, as the ladies still rushed on, "I will have a path cut for you, such a nice path, that you will be able to get along, without the least danger to your dresses. But now—oh, dear, there will be such a lot of mending!"

At this, the ladies only laughed, and bore on all the faster; and a saucy girl called back to ask, if he thought she had never been in a wood till now.

"There won't be a fish, not a single minnow even, if you go ten steps further. Upon my word and honour, it is too bad, after all my trouble, to be laughed at!" So hot was his wrath, that he strove to get in front of the ladies, to bar the way; but the track was so narrow, and the ground so steep, that without a rude push he could not do it. And Dicky was more polite than they, as a host, and a gentleman must be. But suddenly, the ladies met their match.

A shortish old man, with hedger's gloves on, and a rip-hook swinging in one hand, confronted the fair troop at a sharp corner, where the narrow path overhung the river. "Yew baide there, till nex' taime," said the old man, planting a sheep-hurdle, stuffed with furze and briar, under the saucy young lady's nose, and proceeding to lash it, with tough oak frithles, to a pair of stout ash-saplings; "so zoon as Maister Dicky hath had one of 'e a bit, a' wull know better than to razon wi' a vemmel." Having fastened his hurdle at the foot as well, John Sage proceeded with some more important work; and the ladies confessed themselves beaten, for the moment.

"The wood is full of vipers newly hatched," they said to one another, with their usual knowledge; "and even if one could get out of their way, there is no getting through the vile brambles."

So they made up their minds, that there was nothing worth seeing. Nevertheless they were all very angry, or, at any rate, pretended so to be; until they were called to their first refreshment, which proved most satisfactory.

"Now come and see my engineering," cried Dicky, running down the path, in a reek of mud and water, as one who had been labouring, the while they were indulging; "no pop-stuff for me, no thank you! One glass of ale, and I am off again. Mr. Short, you call yourself a great fisherman; come, and see me catch more in one hour, than you will catch in the whole course of your life."

It was villainously true; wicked advantage had been taken of a doubt of the river about its course, where a violent flood had once endeavoured to cut short a gentle winding of the glen. "It ought to be straight," Squire Touchwood said, with a true Briton's love of brevity; "between its extreme points, it has no right to go twisting in that clumsy way. I will get the man's leave, and do it for him. We will invite him to see it done. It will improve his property ever so much; and if he behaves well, he shall have some fish." So Farmer Crang came down, to see what they were going to do with him; and he lived upon so steep a hill, that when he had to go home at night, it kept on knocking him on the chin, much as he tried to keep above it, while feeling that he meant what he had a right to do—to get to his house, at the top of it.

But that happened later. At present he belonged to the Rechabites, for at least twenty minutes, in spite of all the ladies coming up to him with glasses. But when he saw a cork go up, like the rising of a lark, into the sky, Farmer Crang said, "A' must be zumthin undernathe 'un. I winder if a' wud make me go up." It made him go up, for a brief elevation, and come down sadly afterwards.

Therefore, the whole thing was a great success. Without taking anything to raise their colour, the ladies were refreshed into a finer peace of mind; and the gentlemen took heart, and tried to please them. And in excellent spirits, they all set off, to see the great spectacle, now prepared. For the river, running under Fingle Bridge, was ruddy with more than legendary slaughter, or muddy perhaps with the stir of many "navvies." Miss Arthur, inheriting some little share of her father's love of solitude, and as yet unaccustomed to wine and noise, had been wandering in the wood, while the luncheon went on, with a quiet young lady, whose acquaintance she had made; and even Jack Westcombe had failed to find her. But now, she came down, to see what was going on, for

fear of being thought rude and odd. At once Miss Perperaps, who had been doing particularly well among the bottles, ran up and embraced, and scolded and fed her, and turned away the other young lady, and led her to behold the engineering feat.

Alas the poor Teign, like the Achelöus, or the river that offended Cyrus, had been turned out of its ancient bed, for nearly a quarter of a mile. At the head of a long loop, a dam had been piled, while a channel was cut into the heel; the dastardly water, perpetually labouring to degrade itself most rapidly, rushed down the new cut, and deserted the old, with all the bosom-friends enshrined in it. These, in their honest faith, never could believe that the sweet haunts of childhood would bewray them; and they said to one another, as the banks went up, and their own swimming places seemed to go down very low, that here must be a new form of drought, beginning with dreadfully muddy water. But the elderly trout were not satisfied with this; they knew that the world is full of angles, and they hurried up and down, to learn the meaning of it all. Unluckily for them, they added nothing to their wisdom; if they went down stream, John Sage stopped them, with all his descendants wading gladly; if they darted up stream, things were worse, for thick legs in worsted stockings were puddling all the water. Therefore they assembled in their pools, to think about it. And this was as stupid a thing, as they could do.

Men are so prone to think about themselves only, and from a higher view endowed so largely with contempt of what other beings think of them, that scarcely more than two minds, of all the many present, dwelt with any feeling on this outrage to the fish. Mr. Short was shocked, and so was John Westcombe, from that love of fair play which is bred of manly sport; and these two would not even go to see what happened, neither would they taste a fish thus murdered. Rose Arthur also thought it a cruel piece of business; but Spotty was in ecstasy, and dragged her on to look at it.

To describe such a villainous slaughter of trout, would be almost as bad as to share in it. Enough, and more than enough to say, that these poaching scamps got as much as they could carry, with two strong donkeys to help them; and the only piece of luck was that Canon Botrys, in his greed for stewed eel, got his thumb bitten through by a patriarch of that nimble race; and his circulation being somewhat thick, congestion ensued, and he was put upon gruel, without even a spoonful of crusted port to flavour it, until the following October. Sir Joseph Touchwood heard of it, and was truly thankful.

But for the others there was vengeance also. Every one of them became a fish, or wished to be one, for several hours of his life that night. The rain avenged the river, not by sheer wrath only, but also by a subtlety of fine skill, and high finish. Astutely it began, as if meaning nothing beyond a drop or two to lay the dust, and to set the birds singing, and the young men winging their umbrellas for the maidens of their love. The leaves, now growing to a steadfast colour—for oak-apple day was come and gone—took only as many drops as they could hold ; so that eyes under new bonnets might be lifted up, and admire them, without fear of wet response. " How lovely they do look in their tears ! " exclaimed a young lady in sky-blue silk.

" But I hope they won't cry too much," said Spotty.

Laying aside further dread of that, when Prebendary Woolfleece (who kept a rain-gauge) staked his reputation on a lovely evening, all the company, full of bright alacrity, assembled, in the open space below the bridge, to fry their great hoist of fish, and cook their other dainties. Lady Touchwood (who had kept as much out of the way, as was possible for the feast-lady, by force of many good reasons of her own) came forward now, to show her daughter's fearful ignorance of the soundest of all accomplishments. The fires of furze made a beautiful blaze, succeeded by a sweet glow of embers ; frying-pans abounded, and bladders of lard, and jars of very lightly salted butter, and any one, with the rudest rudiments of knowledge, was at liberty to try his hand, or hers, or both together. They did it ; they did not care what came of it, because they had nothing to pay for it ; and supposing a trout to be coal on one side, and as raw as a candle on the other, they found out some part of him done very nicely, and praised one another's cookery. And more engagements, with a view to matrimony, were made, before it began to rain again, than had ever been heard of in so short a time, or than parents approved, or than ever came to anything.

In this witching hour of the time, with gentle feelings, and genial smells beginning to pervade the valley, and the sparkle of the sun upon the lightly sprinkled leaves contributing myriad playfulness, Jack Westcombe, who never had been capable of coping with the growth of the age in facetiousness—the cuckoo, that has ousted both wit, and humour—was looking as if he would like to take one of his hosts by the neck, and lay him in a frying-pan. The desire was natural, but far from just ; for Dicky was behaving in his very best style, and for the good of the company. While laid up so sadly, and

yet so sweetly, at Lark's Cot, he had found out that Rose was a ministering angel at the frying-pan, and especially in the last offices of trout. In right of this knowledge, he brought her forward to a central pan upon the embers, where the poor creatures were being murdered again, by an elegant lady from Exeter. But Rose, though her heart was aroused at such a sight, drew back, with the sensitive recoil of genius, until the other lady upset the frying-pan, and ran away to make a boast of it!

Then Miss Arthur was moved beyond her wont, and resolved to do things properly; for the substance and spirit of good work were in her, and slur and waste were an outrage to her mind. Without a word of anything, she tucked her sleeves up, so as not to leave a crease upon them, and she asked for some butter with no salt in it, and a cold frying-pan without seam on the bottom. Bad work cannot be turned into good; any more than wrong can be turned into right, in this world. Men of great learning came up to help her; but she only bowed, and begged them not to do so. Only, for the sake of her frock, she accepted Archdeacon Barleycorn's offer of his "long front"—who came to an apron afterwards—to save her *liliet* from rockets of the fire capricious. Then she busked up the fire; for it is not good to have too slow an ember, neither to let the pan sit down on it; and then—it would be very unfair to say how—she fried trout, so that they were grateful. And (as every one who does good work, in this age of slur, gets overworked immediately,) from every other bonfire, fish came pouring; and the Chapter awoke to an appetite again, by sniffing, and beholding laymen eat; and Dicky Touchwood was in ecstasies, and Julia loftily sarcastic. For Sir Robert Moneywig had just arrived, and his daughter Chrysolite shone most grandly.

Colonel Westcombe watched all these things duly, in his quiet well-contented style; while Mr. Short bustled about among the ladies, allotting to every one her proper period, as if he still carried his grandfather's watch. After these duties, he foregathered with his friend, bringing a bottle of the "Extra Sec," intended for the great Sir Robert. "Now what do you think of those three girls," he asked, "Miss Moneywig, Miss Touchwood, and Miss Arthur?"

The colonel, in a personal question like this, made a point of forming no hasty opinions; unless he was downright forced to do so, by indignation, admiration, or some other power that stormed his judgment. In his active days, he had waited to be told what he was to do; and then he always did it.

"Short, you know as well as I do. They are all very beautiful

girls," he said. "How is good *Nous?* Is his throat-wound gone?"

"Now don't attempt to put me off like that. I have told you all about him long ago. Much credit to you, that such things should happen. They have made you a Justice of the Peace; and you must stir. But I will know your opinion of my lovely little Rose."

"She is no little Rose, she is a fine tall girl, and very soon will be a beautiful woman. I will not say a word against the others. But even while she works, see how she walks! No Devonshire maid can walk like that. When I was a young man once in Spain —but never mind; all has been ordered for the best."

"I should hope so. You villain, how dare you sigh? But here comes something, both to sigh for, and to groan; as old Farmer Pook said in church, when I exhorted my hearers to sigh for their transgressions. 'Dunno the way to zaigh,' he shouted out, for I happened to look at him, as I spoke; 'our vam'ly always groanies.' And here comes a groaning time for all young ladies. I told you all along, how it would be."

CHAPTER XXIII.

EGYPTIAN NIGHT.

Now all these people—and there must have been a hundred, of the polished material, and as many of the rough, according to the division now in vogue—had thoroughly enjoyed a very pleasant day, and could scarcely expect, as reasonable beings, to enjoy the night as well. Without slaying a black sheep, in honour of the wind, or a white one, to propitiate the moon, or even paying heed to weather-glass, they had ventured, at a risky time of year, into the stronghold of bad weather; and they did not even bless their stars, for the luck so far vouchsafed to them. So they wanted a lesson, and they got it most impressively.

Having made an exemplary mistake of late, and paid for it with his chronometer, Parson Short (although boldly prophetic to the colonel) had refused to do more than shake his head, when the ladies consulted him about their clothes. The wisest of men loses faith in his wisdom, when it has cost him a lump of his tithes, he suspects ironical audience; even as the Pythia might have done, after failing to predict her own robbery. But now there was no possi-

bility of mistake, to any one acquainted with the manner of the moor. "Have you brought your close carriage, as I told you?" asked the parson.

Colonel Westcombe replied that, much as he disliked to be shut up in a box on wheels, he had come in his wife's carriage, both to please her, and to help any women who might be in trouble of the rain.

"There are lots of great people here," said the parson, smiling wickedly, "without so much as Tim Pugsley's poke, to protect their sumptuous raiment. Not one of them will bear the idea of being soaked, although they all have courted it. The Touchwoods have two closed carriages here; but the hired things (such as Rose, and Spotty came in) are as open as a net; a tarred net is their similitude. With half an hour's rain, they drip black drops, that never come out, though you wash and wring, for ever. Little Rose deserves a better fate than that. How lovely she looks in her silver gray! She has not the least sense of the rain impending; and rain, and ruin, are the same word to her frock. She will cry; for she never had such a frock before; and she won't care twopence for its value perhaps, but for the disaster to her father's kindness. Your carriage will be besieged by mighty ladies; but they can afford to get tarred every day. Make Rose go with you, and put her in first, and dare her to come out, and put your terrier on her cloak; or else they will turn her out, or sit upon her lap; those ladies are such tremendous crushers."

"Short, I have known you for twenty years," said his old friend, looking with surprise at him; "but you are full of unknown corners still. See to it all yourself. I cannot perceive any ground for rushing into action, before completing my dinner. One reason why we generally got off pretty well, was that we seldom went into action with empty bellies; as our brave foes very often had to do. What we had was tough; but we got through it, and were fit for tough work afterwards. Ah, there will never be such days again. Our muscles stood up, like stubs of wire, and our teeth would go through heart of oak. How well I remember an old Spanish cock, when I had the honour of dining—but perhaps, I have mentioned that to you before."

"Scarcely less than fifty times. The tale has an improving tendency; and I wish there were time for another edition. This lamb is excellent, and eke the lobster. Take a bone with you, like an old campaigner; and get your horses in, as soon as may be. In a few minutes, there will be helter-skelter. Here comes the swirl of

air, that outruns the storm. I will bring Rosie to the road across the bridge."

"Now, don't you get in front of Jack," called out the colonel, as the parson made off, with the wind behind him; "Jack must learn to do the proper business for the ladies. You have had your time, and let it go by. Leave Rose to Jack; she is too young for you. You may do the best you can, with Julia. Don't hurry me. I won't be hurried. What are these petty drizzles, after the mountain-storms I have had to encounter, for whole weeks together? True it is, that I was younger then——" he added, as his hat flew away into the river; "but never mind, I can always tie my head up. The rising generation is a wonder; but if they lose their hats, their heads go too. Equally hollow both of them."

Colonel Westcombe very seldom said a spiteful word; but it was enough to vex him, to see his new beaver display no swimming power, in the rapids of the Teign; and to hear a loud laugh from some young fellows (meant for gentlemen) who, if they had been at all up to their birth, would have jumped into the water, and pushed one another out of it, in rivalry to help a white-haired man. The Colonel, in reply to their laugh, bowed gravely, to thank them for having observed his trouble; and then, with deliberation, walked into the river, found his water-logged hat, and without another glance at them, crossed the rugged channel, to save going round by the bridge, for his horses. Jack Westcombe, who was watching Rose, saw by her glance that something was wrong in that direction; and as soon as he found out what it was, indignation made him act amiss. For he took the two leaders, in the heyday of their grin, and recalled their jocularity to their own concerns, by delivering them handsomely into a lively stickle.

Scarcely was there time to get fairly through this, before the full brunt of the storm was upon them, and the valley was swept with confusion. The hills seemed to bow in the darkening air; and torrent wisps, like pitchforked hay, covered all the lines of wood, and crag. Away went canvas, kettle-poles, and hampers; and not even a bottle full of stout could keep its heels. The ladies, who would not heed a word of warning, clung to the trees, and strove to bring their skirts behind them; for skirts were then worn, where they now have heel-flaps. Like arrows a cloth-yard long, thickened in with cross-bow bolts, came the flight of the rain, with a cast of blue among the tree-trunks, where it ran into the forest haze. Where it struck the young leaves, they went up, like shells, with the glazed side downward; and any brown folio of last year, still sticking

to its musty chronicle, was whirled and tossed off, like a winnowing.

But one of the worst things, for all the good people, who had fed on the fat of the land all day, and plucked every flower of the valley, was the rising of their ashes, into their own eyes, and teeth. Stacks of dried furze from the hill had been burnt, to enable them to spoil cookery, and many a poor tree had been harried of its young leaves, by their sheltering smoke. And now, being full of intelligence, they owned—whenever they found space for a whisper—that there is such a thing as paying dearly for one's roast.

Young Westcombe had observed, with much vexation, that through Squire Dicky's manœuvre about Rose, his own good father had been robbed of the pleasure of her company, at dinner-time. After all the kindness of Mr. Arthur, and the confidence placed in his honour, Jack had felt, throughout the day, that it would be mean on his part, to take advantage of this neutral ground, and endeavour so to steal into forbidden graces. Nevertheless, it had seemed quite just to bring about, as far as might be, a feeling of good will, and independent liking, between the fair stranger, and the colonel. And now, when he saw the hope of this cut short, in the general confusion, and nobody coming to the aid of poor Miss Arthur, his heart burned within him, to redress the sad neglect. Without a moment lost, he ran up, and led her into a beautifully sheltered spot, where a cove of dry stone was overhung with fringe of ivy. "You never think twice about yourself," he said; "they have roasted you, and run away, and left you to get sodden."

"It is not quite so bad as that," she answered, while the storm increased around; "I am not even wet; and if I were, it would not hurt me, except for my father's kindness."

"How fond you are of your dear father! I am sure, I am not at all surprised at it. I have met him several times; and I feel as if—but he does not want any praise of mine."

"He is far above anybody's praise," said Rose, lifting her gentle eyes with pride; and then for fear of seeming rude, she added,—"but I am very glad that you speak so; because you are so straightforward."

"And what did you think of my father, if you please? You have not seen him at his best to-day. People of this kind put him out, because he is so unpretentious. I was in such a rage, when they called you away, just when my father would have got on well. It was too bad of that little miserable Dicky. I would gladly have put him on the bonfire. I hope he is drenched by this time."

"You should not say such little things. I am sure you do not mean them. He is not well yet; and he is never very strong. There was such a rush of dust, that I cannot be sure; but I think I saw Lady Touchwood, in the distance, putting him into the great yellow carriage, with a tall man to take care of him. He requires to be well looked after."

Jack Westcombe laughed, for he was greatly pleased. Young men seem to have no confidence at all, either in their own choice, or in the judgment of the chosen one; or why do they continually get so jealous of some fellow utterly below contempt? "You scarcely seem to share his dear mamma's opinion of him," Jack became quite noble, as he cast off petty feelings; "but, Miss Arthur, there are many things about him, that one cannot help feeling an affection for. He does not give himself half the airs, that might be expected of him. He is very kind-hearted, and he loves his bit of sport, and he tries to set up a strong way of his own; if his mother, and sister, would only let him. He won't take to cheating, like his father,—at least, that is not what I ought to say; what I mean is, that he does not love commerce, and contracts, and those dishonest ways of getting half-a-dozen carriages. He is soft; but by way of contrast, I like him. Squire Dicky is not a bad fellow at all."

Rose Arthur looked at Jack, as he shook his head judicially, after summing up in favour of Dicky Touchwood; and she wondered at his impartiality about a gentleman, whom he had longed so lately to put upon a bonfire. Somehow or other, she had formed great faith in the stability of this Jack; and now he seemed a Jack of both sides.

"You must not suppose that he will ever do anything," continued the other, for fear of having helped to exalt his rival dangerously; "he will never do any good, as long as he exists. Only it is a great thing to do no harm; for people who have gone up so, and made a heap of money. But you have not told me, what you thought of my good father."

"I never saw anybody I liked so much, without knowing anything about them. He seems to me to be of the very noblest nature; and he had just come up a tremendous hill!"

"He can go up a hill now, every bit as well as I can," said Jack with filial poetic licence; "if it wasn't for his wounds, I could never overtake him. But that is a trifle, compared to what they say about him, in all the great histories. In at least three battles with the entire French army, everything depended upon my father;

and he did it so superbly, that their only chance was, to run away immediately. He never mentions it; and he would be very angry, to think that I knew anything about it. But history is history, and there you find the whole of it. Though I should not have known half as much as I do, if it had not been for old General Punk. The general is a most opinionated man, and a great friend of my father's; and when anything is said, he shuts one eye, and just glances with the other at my father. If you could only see him, you would understand how our old officers conceal their exploits."

"I have always thought, and I am quite sure now," cried Rose, blushing up to her long eyelashes, as she dropped them in sweet excitement, "that my father must have done great exploits too; because he never speaks of them. He was in the thickest of the war in Spain; as I know from a quantity of little things, about olives, and grapes, and cork-trees. But oh, Mr. Westcombe, I never meant to speak of it; and I beg you not to say a word about it. My father's desire is to live in strict retirement; as nearly all the great men long to do. I may trust you, I am sure, not to say a word about it."

"Your father has trusted me," Jack answered, with a gaze magnanimously calm, and abstract, considering the state his heart was in; "I know a great deal more of him, than anybody else does. He said, that he could see what I was quite plainly; and I do not violate any confidence, in telling you that he liked me."

It may be doubted, whether this was purely upright, on the part of Mr. John Westcombe. And he even felt some doubts upon the point himself, when he came to think of it afterwards. But for Rose to be looking at him, as she was, and for him to be looking at her, and knowing how seldom he got any chance of so doing—purely through his own uprightness—and feeling what a difference it made to him, even to be near her, in the very worst of weather; and what a thing it would be, to have made her think a little of him, just now and then, with a gentle bit of sympathy, and a soft curiosity about his thoughts—all this, in one moment, crowding in upon him so, left him very little time for neglecting his own interests.

"If the rain would only stop," said the young lady, looking round, for something superior to talk of; "but it seems to be growing darker, almost every minute. It serves me quite right, for my selfishness in coming."

"You should never say that. You did not come, to please yourself; but because your father wished it. Leave everything to me.

I will take good care, that you shall get home quite dry, and very nice—though nothing could make you look anything but nice. Now will you be frightened, if I run away, for less than ten minutes; and will you promise strictly to stay here?"

She laughed at the idea of being frightened; and nodded, with a pretty smile, her promise to stay there. "But I am so afraid that you will get wet!" she said, with a glance worth a thousand thorough duckings. In fear of making answer too impulsive, Jack kissed his hand, and set forth into the storm, wishing hotly that there was a hurricane, or deluge, to meet for her sake, and to shield her from. And she came to the corner of the shelter, and peeped round, with her beautiful hair scattered down the outward shoulder, and her hat blown back, and the carmine of the wind striking the oval of her gentle face.

"Go back," he shouted; and she obeyed him, and thought of him, the whole time that she was left alone.

The age of our country was already falling into that querulous dotage of finicking, now so universal in the toothless time; but still a young Englishman was ashamed, to put himself under an umbrella; though now his only shame is, to have one too large to be taken for more than his essential parasol. Jack had no idea—for love was still existing—whether it rained, or blew, or thundered, or whether an earthquake was running in the neighbourhood. The only occupation of his mind was, to consider the doings of Rose, and the sayings of Rose, the lookings of Rose, and the thinkings of the same, whenever they were not past finding out. And he never said to himself—"I may be a fool;" the wisdom, or the folly, of himself was never mooted. His heart was gone entirely beyond his mind's discussion; and the two agreed to let it be; so long as they were happy.

"Why, Jack, my boy, you look as if you had just come across an angel," Mr. Short exclaimed, in his unromantic style, as Westcombe rushed in, among a score of people fighting for a dry place, until they got their carriages; "come along a little way, and I will introduce you to Canon Botrys, and our good Archdeacon. Young men should never miss an opportunity. I know a man who got a living, because his handkerchief was dry. You ought to be in orders, and you shall be yet; because it is too late for anything else. They are under a wall; and they have got nice daughters. You will go away, without having seen a single soul."

"I have seen everybody in the place worth seeing; and I don't know how to see souls;" Jack answered, with a rudeness unusual

to him ; but the levity of Bachelor Short was distasteful to his feelings. "All I want to know is—where is our trap, and where is the governor?"

"Let me put you up to a little thing, Jack," the vicar replied, with a turn of kind thought, which the young man had scarcely earned of him ; "if you want to keep a seat, in your good father's carriage, for some one very nicely dressed, and likely to shed tears at the drops of tar-water, let the other flys, and rumbelows, come down first. The ladies will rush into the first that come ; without two thoughts of ownership. And the colonel is so polite, that he would let them pack your carriage, up to the glasses, and order him all about with it. You would never get home to-night, to begin with ; and you could not squeeze even Spotty Perperaps in, not to speak of any other well-dressed young lady. You twig me. Ha, see the first proof of it!" A lumbering fly came down ; and was crammed, four on each seat, before the horse could stick his heels in.

"Thank you!" cried Jack. "What a clear head you have got! Mr. Short, I beg your pardon. You have obliged me greatly. But keep Miss Perperaps for our carriage."

In another instant, he was running up the hill, just in time to stop his father's carriage from coming down it ; though the colonel, defiant of all rain, was on the box. "Draw aside a bit, I want to speak to you," cried Jack ; and his father obeyed him, for he saw that it was earnest.

"Take the reins, and manage it yourself," replied the colonel, as soon as he had heard what his son's idea was ; "I dare say you are right ; and it would please me more, to save a poor young lady, than a dozen of these grand madams, who have fifty fine dresses at home."

"She never thinks twice about her dress," said Jack ; "she would look just as well in a potato-sack. It is only because her father was so kind about it. Miss Perperaps told me the story ; and I hope to have her with us also ; because she is not very rich. Father, jump inside, you are very wet already."

By this good management, it was brought about, that the colonel, and Miss Perperaps, had the carriage to themselves, and Mr. Short stood by the horses, while Jack, with a great pile of wrappings, went to look for his beloved. She had obeyed his injunction to stay there, and added such a pretty blush of pleasure, to her look of gratitude for his thoughtfulness, that he scarcely knew how to protect her enough.

"Please to remember one thing," he said, as her dimpled chin protruded from his mother's carriage-fur, and he took the liberty of asking for a pin; "unless you keep quite close to my arm, through the wood, everything will blow away, and my father will abuse me. He always says, that I am so clumsy, whenever ladies are concerned."

"Then I doubt, whether he can understand the subject; or, at any rate, not so well as you do. You have done everything, to perfection; and I shall never be able to thank you enough."

In a quarter of an hour, Jack was driving up the winding hill, towards Drewsteignton; a very long roundabout road, but the only one fit for a carriage towards the moor; while Mr. Short fetched his own horse, and faced the storm, up the steepy track, that climbs to Cranbrook Castle. "I shall be at Christowell, long before you are," he had called in at the window, as he saw Rose sitting, in a happy condition, at the colonel's side, and Spotty set up opposite, in a grin of lively comfort. "Young ladies, shall I tell your dear parents all about you?"

"You had better not," cried Miss Perperaps audaciously; "we are all right now; and we want them to get anxious. My pa would be very anxious, if he dared."

"I shall tell your dear step-mamma, that you have been drowned; it will be such a shock to her—when you come home alive."

Spotty was delighted with this tantalising prospect; and she had such a real style of laughing, when she did laugh—which was not very often, for a frequent is a feeble laugh—that the parson, in spite of all the weather, caught it up, and said to himself, as he rode away briskly, "I know a good many young fellows, who might do worse than marry Spotty Perperaps. In the dark she looks almost as well as Miss Arthur; and we mortals spend most of our time in the dark. I must get up this hill, though, before it grows darker; or down I go through the tree-tops."

For the gloom of night was closing in; so that the valley seemed to deepen, and grow narrower, with the folds of the storm-cloud sweeping through the hollows, the clevices of crag thrown forth, by the bowing of trees to the wind, and the patches of gorse-land darkened by the soaking rain. Jack Westcombe was fain to urge his horses up the hill, that he might get past the dangerous places, before the last of the daylight waned.

"What a shame to let him get so wet!" said Spotty, who very soon dropped formality. "You must have brought a coachman, or a footman, or somebody?"

"Only one man, to look after the horses; and I lent him to some ladies, whose driver had enjoyed the refreshments of the day too heartily. I fear there will be many accidents to-night. Six casks of XXX, from Dunsford brewery, was an error of judgment upon Master Dicky's part. However, have no fear about my son. He gets wet upon the moor, continually."

"What an extraordinary thing," replied Spotty, who liked to give the world all the benefit of her shrewdness, "that your son should know the road, on this side of the moor, so well! I thought that you lived, all away by Okehampton. There is no carriage-road, in that direction, from our village."

"Well, now you speak of it, I am surprised a little. Jack is always riding, or walking about, here, there, and everywhere, without much object. His dear mother calls him a Jack-of-the-lantern. But that would not teach him these roads, as you say; but rather the places where there are no roads. However, he seems to know his way right well. He has a most wonderful memory, that young man. It would be wrong for me to praise him; but I never meet any one, who does not admire his abilities, and what is far more, his discretion, and steadiness, high principles, and truly noble feelings."

"He seems to know how to drive, at any rate. Don't you think so, Rosie, dear?"

"I know so little of carriages, that I cannot pretend to be a judge," answered Rose. "The only carriage I understand, is Mr. Pugsley's tilt-cart; but I have a very slight acquaintance also, with Mr. Short's yellow four-wheeled gig."

Colonel Westcombe laughed, and took her hand in his. "I like you very much," he said, "because you are so truthful. Your father must allow you to come, and spend some time with us. I have heard, that you have no mother; only a good father, to whom you are greatly attached, and who lives a very quiet life, just as we do."

Then suddenly Rose (who had never found time, in the hurry and flurry, to think about it) discovered, that this most kind and loveable gentleman, looking so gently at her, was Mr. Short's friend, whom he had wished to bring over to see them, two or three months ago. She ought to have known it long ago; but her mind had been occupied so entirely, with the many new impressions of this strange day, that the one perception, of most importance to her own little world, had escaped her. Now if, through her selfish stupidity, her father's indulgence, and confidence, should recoil upon him, in the

very result which he feared the most, better had she never beheld this day. Better, at any rate, would it be, to walk the many miles of rain and darkness, than to bring to her father's door the man, whom least of all he wanted there. She longed to jump out of the carriage at once; but a second thought showed her the folly of arousing curiosity, by an outrageous act. So she leaned back in the darkness, with a miserable mind.

"You do not answer me, my dear," said Colonel Westcombe, in his quiet, winning tone, as if he sought a favour; "perhaps you are thinking, that I should have asked your father's kind consent, before I spoke. If so, I believe that you are quite right. I spoke, on the spur of the moment, from a wish not only to please myself, but to add to the happiness of my dear wife. Her health is not at all what we could wish. She is quite unable to meet rough people, or even our general visitors. But she loves a gentle face like yours, and a soft voice, and sweet quiet ways. And I am sure, you will not think me rude in saying, that no young lady would be the loser, by the friendship of one so good, and kind, and motherly, and wonderfully well-informed."

"Oh, I know what it would be; I have very often felt it. It is the very thing that I should like most dearly," Rose answered, with a little sigh; which vexed her when she thought of it. "But there are always troubles—or at least, I should say obstacles—I cannot express myself very well, I know—but I thank you with all my heart; and you will understand me."

"It is the way her pa shuts her up," Miss Perperaps explained, reaching forward to the colonel, as if he were deaf, as well as stupid; "the very same thing, that my step-ma does to me. Only I do want dragooning, I admit; because I am awfully fond of pleasure. But she—you might put her in a bucket, and wind her up and down a well, all day; and she would smile, every time she came out at the top."

"You are a remarkable young lady too," said the colonel, looking, with new interest, at as much as he could make out of this quick movement, which came to his shirt-frills, and then jerked back; "you seem to lose no time, in making up your mind, and if possible, less in declaring it."

"That's my card. I am sat upon a good bit; because my pa must go, and have another sort of wife; when I was doing bloomingly. But I am beginning to come round; and now, they find me hot to sit upon."

Of all the things Colonel Westcombe loathed, slang from a young

girl's lips was foremost. The girls of the present day fancy it a new thing, and a "rise" upon their elders, to patter this vile English. If they knew, that their grandmothers were beaten out of all that stale stuff, in their infancy, perhaps they would eschew the nauseous trick.

Are you an intimate friend of Miss Arthur?" Colonel Westcombe asked, without showing surprise; "and did her father entrust her to your charge?"

"I am not half so thick with her, as I should like to be. I scraped acquaintance first, professionally; and I haven't got much further now; though I like her. And as for her coming under my wing, colonel, there is not a year between us, I believe; and we both came under the Reverend Short; but he was spoons all day, on Julia."

The elderly man was made quite happy by this explanation; for he knew the deep obstinacy of his son; and how love even screws down the lids of blind eyes. And it would have made a sad want of echo in his heart, if his only boy had loved a girl capable of being "very thick" with Spotty Perperaps. Then, his generous nature told him, that he had wronged Miss Arthur, by the questions he had put; and he scarcely saw how to let her know it, except by endeavouring to find her hand again.

Her hand was trembling, when he found it; for a tallow-candle, stuck in a blacking-jar, and twinkling through lozenges of green glass, revealed the toll-gate on the Exeter road, within a mile of Christowell; and the poor girl could think of no device, for keeping this carriage from her father's gate. Very soon, a splashing, and a grinding sound announced the crossing of the Christow ford, below the village; and then Spotty called out, "There's my pa's house! Highly genteel, with a red bull's eye. Hold hard, mister; and thank you very much."

Miss Perperaps, after shaking hands with the colonel, bounced out, and rang the paternal bell; while Rose made a quick attempt to follow, but without a rude push could not get by. "No, no, my dear; we will take you to your own door; or as near to it as we can get," Colonel Westcombe said decisively; "this is not a night for walking, one step more than can be helped. Drive on, my boy, as far as Mr. Arthur's. Don't tell me about the road," he continued, as Rose began imploring him not to risk his carriage; "if Pugsley can go there, so can we. Gee up, coachey!" Jack (though he had his own misgivings as to what might come of it) aroused his nags with a cheerful flick, which made them sidle into

one another; as men do, when the whip is in the air; both for the sake of sweet sympathy, and that the other may get the first turn of it.

"What a dark night!" said the colonel, as they came to the bottom of the hill, below Lark's cot; "perhaps we have met the moorland air. I never understand about such things, though I ought to do so thoroughly. It seems to me, to come in through the glass, a great deal more than the rain did. But perhaps I ought to lay the blame on my old eyes. Jack must have cat's eyes, to keep out of the ditch."

"I am sure he has very nice eyes, Colonel Westcombe; not at all like cat's eyes. And we ought to be very thankful to him, for the care he has taken of us all to-night."

"You seem to like Jack very much," said the colonel; though he felt that it was not at all the thing to say.

"I never saw any one I liked more, as a stranger, of course, and a gentleman; unless it was yourself, Colonel Westcombe."

That gentleman thanked her, and said no more. Only to himself he thought—"Jack has still got his work to do; if he means to have this lovely girl. She respects him; but she does not love him yet. No girl, worth having, tumbles into deep affection, even for such a fine fellow as my son. He must have opportunities; and he shall have them, if her father is worthy to be her father. And I ought to find that out at once."

To his great chagrin, and the pure delight of Rose, who was thinking mainly of her father still, the densest depth of night, that ever drove down from Dartmoor, came around them. The rain stopped suddenly, and the wind was hushed, except in the tops of invisible trees; and a streak of black boggy fog settled heavily. The carriage-lamps (which had long been flickering, but managed to survive, while they got air) now gave up the ghost, in the murky reek.

"I can't see where to stop," Jack called in, through the front glass of the carriage. "I'm afraid that we must have passed the gate. Please to ask Miss Arthur."

"Please to stop here, if you have got my daughter," a clear voice, from one unseen, replied; and the panting horses, with their superior sense, came to a standstill suddenly.

"You shall not get out, Colonel Westcombe; I beg of you, for my sake, not to get out," cried Rose, that her father might know who was come. "Oh, father dear, how you must have been frightened! I will never go away again."

Jack Westcombe heard kissing, which went to his heart, as Rose sprang into her father's arms; and then Mr. Arthur, forgetful of everything, except the duty of a gentleman, came forward to the carriage-door, and said—

"Colonel Westcombe, I thank you, with all my heart for your great kindness to my child. Will you come into my cottage, and have something? You have many miles, I fear, to travel yet."

"Sir, I am very much obliged to you," the ancient officer answered, without even trying to descry the other's face, of which the darkness gave small chance; "but we must not stop, now we have done our duty. And a pleasure too,—the very greatest pleasure, to have been of the smallest service to a young lady, who has charmed me so. Good night, sir. Good night, my dear Miss Arthur. I only hope, that you have not caught cold."

"Oh, I do like him so much," said Rose, as the carriage rumbled down the hill; "he reminds me continually of you, papa. I do believe, you must have been a great deal together."

"It can hardly be possible," thought the colonel to himself; "and yet I seemed to know the voice so well. But if so, poor fellow, how he is to be pitied! I scarcely know, what will be the proper thing to do."

CHAPTER XXIV.

ON THE "DEFIANCE."

THE vicar of Christowell, all this time, though he entered into society—as the people, who like to be from home, express it—was not unmindful of his wrongs. He had the pusillanimous feeling of a fellow, who objects to the wrong end of the stick; which now is received by our noble country, with a sweet request for more. The latter, no doubt, is the loftier way of getting the worst of it, and leads up to the surety of getting it again. However, the old style seems to have been, to lay hold of the cudgel, after serious groanings, and try how it would work, with the other end.

It was not any very low desire for redress, nor even that selfish sense of property, which now is being exploded by the firebrand of the age; nay, nor even that stability to dinner-time, which is now lost, because there is neither time nor dinner—but it was a larger

thing, which bound the parson fast (as his own Mrs. Aggett had been tied that day) to the steadfast righting of his wrongs.

"Bain't no good for 'e, to prache to me" old Betty Sage had declared to Mr. Short, when he could not help calling her to account for language, because of a baby running in between her legs, when the day was warm, and she was rather short of breath. "Passon Shart, tend thee own ouze, fust. Happen, you swared a bit, when they robbed 'e. Goo, and vaind 'un out, if 'e knooeth Holy Scripter."

It was not her opinion only (although it carried great weight in the parish, now that her husband was away, and believed to be earning twice as much as he was worth) but it was the universal sense concerning the parson, and the sad way in which his people touched their hats to him, and the heap of small condolence which came in through Mrs. Aggett, that really drove this very clever-minded man, to try to do something that should set him up again. For he could not bear to be pitied, and advised, and to get no stick-thumps on the floor, for the shrewd hits, and "prime doctorin'," of the oldest, and wisest, of all his sermons.

For the better preservation of the peace, an Act had been passed, in the very last session, and already was beginning to do a good deal of mischief, no further off than Exeter. A very considerable quantity of men had been appointed to preserve the peace, as "county, or district constables;" but preferring foreign words to English, and knowing the fear that springs of them, they began to call themselves "Rural Police." Christowell had not heard of them yet, except through carrier Pugsley; but there was a man at Manaton, a superior parish constable, who said that he knew all about them, and could swear that they were the biggest fools going in the county.

Mr. Short, though he could not foresee the rising incapacity of this force, resolved (as a hater of new-fangled ways) to make no appeal to their vigilance. In his own shrewd mind, he had formed a firm belief, though without any premises producible, that the man who had robbed his house, was no other than the rogue in the swamp, who had fired at his *Nous*. The people of the village,—though they tried to recollect, with a jogging of one memory against another,—could not be sure that they had seen anybody, in the very heavy rain, going by that day; though they thought they must have looked at him, if they had, because he would have been so wet-like. But without twice moving of their minds, they espied the sense of it. That there one that jumped to the top

of church-tower, the same came down to vicarage; both praying, and preaching, was an empty gun-shot, if you couldn't keep him ou of your own kitchen.

"Physician, heal thyself," is the hardest, and most unanswerable of all taunts—in the present condition of medicine—and when it is proved against the parson of a parish, that he cannot keep the Prince of evil out of his own house, the sphere of his usefulness —to put it in the mildest form possible — becomes restricted. Parson S ort was bound to be the master of his parish; and he vowed a great vow, not to give away sixpence, until his flock should be as dutiful as ever, and proud to run a race, when he whistled.

There was a little woman now, living at Okehampton, who knew everything about almost everybody. She was closely connected with literature, not only because she kept a little paper-shop, but also that she had a female cousin who wrote verses, and some of them were printed. The verses were good, and in the style of Dr. Watts, a poet under-valued now, almost as much as he is misquoted. But that is quite beside the present question. Only that some people took it on themselves, to declare that Mrs. Petherick never could have known all she did, except for her connection with the press, and her son being prenticed at Exeter.

"The women are a hundred times sharper than the men, round our part of the country," Jack Westcombe had said to Mr. Short, one day. "The men see things, and think no more about them; but they generally tell them to the women, at the time, and the women make the meaning out of them. The next time you come our way, go, and buy something from little Mrs. Petherick. You need not make her talk. She will do it, without asking; and you may pick something up, for she knows everybody. Don't tell her, who you are; see how cleverly she will find out."

The vicar had already made some expeditions into the depth of the moorland, and among the lonely farm-houses on the outskirts, in the vain hope of finding some trace of the fellow, who had carried off his money, and what he valued more, the watch of his respected grandsire. Sometimes he took a fishing-rod, sometimes a gun, as a pretext for his wanderings; and once or twice he rode, and fastened up his horse, while he was exploring dangerous parts. He even called once at the *Raven*, and saw the man who could have told him many interesting things; but Gruff Howell held his peace; and neither there nor elsewhere, was any sign forthcoming of the enemy. So now he went to see Mrs. Petherick, without even calling at Westcombe Hall.

The leaders of the age, whose main desire is to give fair play to every one, but first and foremost to all rogues,—as they perpetually prove, by preferring foreign to British produce—had lately made a mighty step towards enlightenment, and adulteration—a march of intellect, known to the present generation, as the "Reform Bill." Although from a bill, it ungrubbed itself into an Act, and went hovering about, without doing half the harm expected (as a cock-chafer, after his larva stage, is harmless, and amuses bad boys, when he is stuck upon a pin), yet there was a sad piece of mischief done here, in the very town where Mrs. Petherick lived. That ancient, and honourable town, Okehampton, baronial, royal-chartered, standing on two rivers, was found to contain such a scarcity of rogues, that it must not send any up to Parliament.

This blow had killed Mr. Petherick, according to the evidence of his widow, who must know best about it. He had always taken the lead, among one hundred and fifty freemen, who returned two members, with the truest pleasure, every time they required returning. There could be no meaner thing, than to dream of any possibility of harm in this. However, it must have been dreamed of; or why should Mrs. Petherick (who used to wear her own lace, on nomination-day, and again at the chairing, in her own bow-window) be driven, at the present time, to sell papers—though papers were a very decent trade, as yet—and spectacles, and tea-spoons of best Britannia metal, and to keep three young women in the back parlour, making lace to pattern for the ladies all around?

Mr. Short knew very little of Okehampton, and was pleased to see how nice it looked, with its quiet old windows, and round-pebbled street, and church peeping down upon it from a wooded crest, and another church bravely sending back the look; and above all, two very tidy bridges, scarcely half a pipeful of tobacco apart. Leisurely and round-faced folk live here, with a large amount of female fatness, and a breadth of brogue so spacious, that even a Devonshire man can hardly make out, what the boys are holloaing to one another. They all said, "Sarvant, sir," to Mr. Short, as soon as they had seen his horse, and white tie; for the coaches, then running through the town from Falmouth, had a tendency to import good manners; wherein the railways do an export trade alone. Sturdy urchins, vying with one another, without any dream of a halfpenny for guerdon, led Mr. Short to Mrs. Petherick's shop; while *Trumpeter* stopped at the White Hart, considering the important subject of refreshment.

If Mrs. Petherick had a fault (besides the original one of curiosity,

which standeth in the following of Eve) it was that she preferred a new customer to an old one, being taken with the beauty of the bird in the bush. In the present loose days of co-operative stores (when the noble mind hesitates, betwixt the pang of paying twice too much for a thing, and the pain of aggrieving a fine neighbourly spirit) it may be true wisdom in a solid tradesman, to dance to every little puff of commerce, because he has no sure trade-wind. But forty years ago, a hap-hazard shilling might cool itself on the counter while the books were being done.

"And what can I do for you sir, now? It is a pleasure to see a new face in Okehampton; the breeze of our wind brings a beautiful colour into the cheeks of our visitors. I hope you are come, to make a long stay, sir. The change of the weather makes such a difference, don't it? The clergy ought to go, for change of air more often. Surely I must have the pleasure of seeing the Rev. Brown, of Manaton?"

"I heartily hope that you may, Mrs. Petherick," Mr. Short answered, without surprise, being used to the style of the Devon shopkeepers; "but I fear that you will have to wait some time; for he is in the hands of three doctors now."

"Ah, poor dear! It is very hard upon him. What a wicked thing that gout is, to be sure! It always attacks the clergy so bad! And what a lovely set of lace I sold him; perhaps you have seen it upon Mrs. Brown, sir? Necklet, with lappets down to here, and cuffs to match, and a wide turn-over; all of the finest Honiton! And then the lady wanted more; and I made sure that you was come about it. But what can I do for your good lady, sir? Eliza, bring me drawer No. 3. We have just done a set, of new Shiny-oister pattern, the fashionable flower at the young Queen's court, all drawed first on tissue-paper, and improved by my own hand, sir."

"They are indeed beautiful," said Mr. Short; "How I envy your taste, Mrs. Petherick! But alas, at present, there is no Mrs.—— Ah, there, I was going to be rude, and trouble you with my name; which would not interest you."

"Yes, indeed, it would, sir, very much. Sometimes it appears to me very hard, that we poor shop-keepers should be bound to keep our own names, over the door, and yet have no idea, who rings the bell. Did it ever strike you, in that light, sir?"

"Never, till now. But I at once confess the grievance. But oh, Mrs. Petherick, you know too much already! I hear that you are the cleverest lady, in Okehampton."

"Only in the way of laces, sir, and book-learning, and politeness.

There are many as can buy, and sell me; because what they sell is downright rubbish. I just get the cost of the thread, and the time, and the victuals my young ladies eats. You may see them at work, if you come here. They like to be looked at by a gentleman; but away go their pillows if a lady peeps in."

"Come, come, Mrs. Petherick, you are too bad. I did not mean to buy any lace. But have you any pattern in roses? I know a young lady—quite a child——"

"Then, sir, I have the very thing for you. Moss-roses in the bud, my own designing; the loveliest thing, and so reasonable!"

The parson bought a very pretty piece of work, for a couple of guineas, and was having it packed, when the coach from Falmouth, the old *Defiance*, came over the western bridge at a brisk trot, with a great horn blowing, and pulled up at the inn. Mrs. Petherick rushed to the window to gaze, and her customer opened the door, to do the same.

"My goodness, there he is! I shall drop, sir, I shall drop," the little woman cried; but she did not drop, though her ruddy cheeks lost all their colour. "What a burning shame it is to our country, that such a villain should walk the earth!"

Mr. Short, without asking what she meant, stepped back, to be sure that she did not want help; and then, instead of going to the door again, took a chair, and sat down to watch the coach, through the light things hanging in the window. There was nothing unusual, so far as he could see. The coachman did what a coachman always does, or did until he became extinct. He threw down the reins, with a condescending nod, handed his whip to a gentleman behind—for the gentleman on the box descended to stand treat—and then after thumping himself on the chest, although it was a shirt-sleeve day, down he went, very clumsily and slowly; even as a boatman is one of the worst to get into, or out of, his own boat.

"He is a most abstemious man," said Mrs. Petherick; "at this time of year he scarcely ever takes anything stronger than brandy and lemonade. That man has fourteen children. And he scarcely looks five and thirty yet. He is planting his children all along the road. He drives twelve stages, up one day and down the next; and they say that he means to have two children at every stage, all born in holy matrimony; as I myself can testify, because his wife was a barmaid here." The lady of the shop had now recovered from her scare, and seemed anxious to divert attention from it. But the parson would not have it so.

"If I may ask, without rudeness," he said, "what was it that

frightened you, when the coach came in? They all seem very quiet, tidy people. My sight is pretty good. I can see their faces; and I cannot see anything formidable yet. Perhaps, the one that frightened you jumped down, before I looked."

"No, sir, he is there, with his shoulders towards us, and his back against a brown-haired trunk. These day-coaches carry no proper guard; they only have a boy to blow the horn; and the man I mean is sitting, or slouching, next to the one who is opposite the boy. There, he has put his hand up to his chin!"

The street is of a good width in that part, and the coach having stopped some little way back, as well as on the other side, and having luggage on the roof, the hind passengers could not be discerned very clearly, from the window of the paper shop. And the man with his hand to his chin appeared to be sleepy, and scornful perhaps of the town; so that he did not turn round, and stare about.

"You will see him better presently, when they come by; but you had better not seem to notice him," Mrs. Petherick continued, as she hung a scarf across, to baffle any eyes that might invade her. "I would not let him see me, not for £50; to know, I mean, that I was watching him. Sometimes I have lace to repair for ladies, worth £200 or more; let alone ten, or twelve, drawerfuls of my own."

"But surely, my dear madam, you never mean to say, that a man would be riding about on a coach, in broad daylight, who would break in, and steal your lace!"

"Not lace in particular, sir, but anything. Nothing comes amiss to him; and he can break in, anywhere. And as for his riding on the coach, there is no one, in the town or out of it, who would know him, in the manner he is dressed up now; or if they did, they would not dare. He is quite the gentleman, when he chooses; and he got some very good clothes, no doubt, when he plundered that stupid Parson Short."

"What Parson Short?" asked the parson of that name; "there are several in the diocese, I believe."

"The rich Parson Short, sir, of Christowell. I am told, it was a most amusing thing. He was lured from home, like a simple Simon; and when he came back, he found his cook tied up, and all his dinner eaten, and the other maid locked in, with no other food than his sermons, for the day. And I hear that she found them uncommon tough, and dry. No wonder, poor girl, for he is the very dryest man that ever went up the pulpit-stairs. Our people did laugh,

when they heard the joke. And they say, that he boiled the parson's spinach, for he is a bit of an epicure, you must know, and was going to have it with a breast of lamb; but the other man enjoyed it, and then fastened up the dish, over the face of the poor fat cook. But the other man had his disappointment too; for the gentleman's leg-garments would not come below his knee. Short, by name, he is, and short by nature."

He was almost short in language too; and his clear and clean face flushed with wrath, at this stinging description of his woes.

"This must be a most outrageous town for gossip," he said looking sternly at the streets thereof; "and full of wicked falsehoods, and very low ones."

"No, sir, not more than anywhere else," Mrs. Petherick answered pleasantly; "but we do love a pretty tale about a clergyman; and every word of what I have been telling you is true. But here they are off, with a flourish of the whip. Now, if you will look between that paper and the tambour-work, you will have a good view of the gentleman that did it. Shall I tell you, what he has been to Falmouth for?"

"I know that some parts of your story are wrong, and I doubt whether you know anything about it." He spoke a little rudely, to provoke her tongue, while he watched for that felonious passenger.

"No, sir, you are quite right. I don't know an atom about him. I don't know the figure, how he holds himself, whatever clothes he may put on, nor the individdle way of making lines inside his clothes, that the men get, by reason of no stiffness. And perhaps I don't know why he went to Falmouth, to get the best price for a celebrated watch, such as they can work a ship by. I did hear that it was worth £200. But I don't know, I am sure; I don't know anything."

"It is the man!" cried Mr. Short, as the coach passed slowly, with laborious wind of horn; "I can't tell how I know it; but I am sure that he is the man. What makes him come through the town, like this, when he might have got down, four or five miles back? And how far will he go with the coach? Mrs. Petherick, you seem to me to know everything."

"No, sir, no. I make no pretences. But in my humble thinking, he has come through the town, because it was the safest thing for him to do. His pockets are full of money; and a robber is always most frightened of being robbed. There is a gang of louters, Sourton way, who would cry shares with him, if they spied him in his clericals. And as for the danger of the town, there is none. We

have a man, who calls himself a constable; but he never stirs without a warrant; and we have a very nice old gentleman indeed, just made a Justice of the Peace; but all he can do is to fight the battle of Waterloo, or Salamander, again. And as for the mayor, he won't do nothing, ever since we were robbed of our old borough. The whole of the difference between right, and wrong, was upset, when they took away both members."

"What is a lobster worth, without his claws? But how far will this clerical gentleman go, after riding in triumph through Okehampton?"

"As far as Crosscombe, sir, most likely, and then take the lane to Sticklepath, or Belstone. That will bring him back to the wild parts of the moor, by an easier way than Sourton. And he shifts about pretty often, I believe; though he is more at home than welcome, as we say, whatever part he lives in. But good heart alive, you are never going after him! You would be a baby, in his hands."

"Babies are troublesome creatures sometimes," exclaimed Mr. Short, being vexed once more; "but I am not going after him, with any idea of laying hands on him, among a lot of cowards; when he has fire-arms, and I have none. I beg you to make no stir about it; for that would defeat my object. Do not even see me, when I get my horse out. I am Mr. Short, of Christowell, whose dryness in the pulpit is proverbial here, though quite satisfactory to his own parish. It is not true, that yonder fellow ate my dinner; but still I have a bone to pick with him; and my chance will be spoiled, if you talk about it. I thank you for your very shrewd hit about my watch. The cleverest woman in the town should be so far superior to her sex, that she can hold her tongue, when a great pinch is put on it."

"The only difficulty that I find is, to express myself, not to contain myself, sir. When poor Petherick was paying of them freemen, average of £15 per vote, and the other side was trying every low inducement——"

"Another time, if you please, I shall be delighted. I want the old *Defiance* to get well in front; and I don't want to seem to be riding in chase. It is a long hill towards Crosscombe, and stirrups will easily beat traces. Now if you say nothing about this affair, I will not even tell my old friend Colonel Westcombe, to fight his battles over again with me."

"You have read me a lesson, to be shy of the clergy, sir. They always looks, as if they was so gracious; and then they

drop on you, like the core of a box-oven. But you had better not take your lace, sir."

"No; I will pay for it, and ask you to send it to kind care of Colonel Westcombe. I hope to be there, in a day or two. Good-bye, ma'am."

"Good-bye, sir. I need not tell you, I think, to take care of yourself; you are sure to do that. It would take a sharp man to eat his dinner"—she continued to herself, as she beheld him crossing the street, without any sign of hurry, to get his horse out of the stable. "Short he may be; and no wonder he was short with me, after what I said of him; but the short men are the best to wrestle, after all. Why there he goes, horse and all! The Lord deliver him!"

Mr. Short however required no especial deliverance, on this occasion. At a mile, or so, over East Ockment bridge, he sighted the *Defiance* on the crown of a hill, and his keen eyes showed him, that the interesting passenger was sitting in the same place on the roof. Then he followed very cautiously, and kept behind the corners, until the coach stopped, where a narrow lane departed, on the right hand side, towards Belstone, and the moor. Here he saw the tall man get down, and pay his fare, and swing a little knapsack on his shoulder, containing perhaps some good things from Falmouth. Then the villain looked about, to be sure that no one watched him, and presently set off along the narrow lane, with the top of his hat showing over the dry wall. Short rode into a gateway hung with foliage, and considered that hat, as it jogged along the loopholes of the granite slabs.

"I could cut him off easily enough," he thought; "and call him to account; but he would settle me. He is sure to have at least one tremendous pistol; and I have nothing but this hunting-crop. It would have been foolish to attack him on the coach; for nobody would have helped me, and there were two women there. It would be still more foolish to attack him now, without even a witness to my murder. After all, that is not my hat. It is much too respectable to belong to me. He bought it at Falmouth with my money. Perhaps, I am a coward; but why should a good man be killed for nothing? What would Mrs. Aggett say? And who would carry on all my works? Nay, I will be discreet, and only observe him beyond bullet-range. If I accosted him, as a neutral, it would do more harm than good; as I know him already, and he then would know me, which is not at all to be desired."

With these reflections he restrained himself, as a truly wise man is bound to do; and calmly postponing the settlement of accounts, resolved to help it one line forward, by observing the route of the enemy. Therefore, as soon as he came to a gate, where the rocky expanse of the desert began, he fastened up his horse, and going warily afoot, had the pleasure of descrying a dark figure in the distance, and watching it follow the desolate windings of Belstone Cleeve, towards the source of the Skate river. Here a three-knuckled hill, with water-clefts, and yellow knolls of rushes, and swamp-reeds, barred the view; and the distant form disappeared among them, after turning to the right.

"He has made for Cranmere. It is about a league further. None but the moormen could find him there. It is hard enough to find the place itself, much more such an atom as a man, among it. Well, well, I have done something; and as much as I could hope to do. *Trumpeter* must be quite tired of waiting. Suppose we go quietly home to dinner, with gratitude, and a fine appetite."

CHAPTER XXV.

FOR MY SON'S SAKE.

PEOPLE of so bald a nature, as to find but little joy in all the things around them, take at any rate some delight in their own superior thickness. With laughter, they look down upon the fads, the crotchets, and the hobbies, of the few who still have soft enjoyment, outside money, and away from show. Yet these latter smile at laughter; and the smile outlives the louder operation; even as the sun survives the storm.

Every just man has his periods for incurring the opinions of the wiseacres, when his name turns up, through a law-suit, or an accident, or perhaps some great wrong done to him. And his true course is to exclude all care, not only as to what those wiseacres say, but whether they even draw their fleeting breath about him. After short disquietude, and a little council with himself, Mr. Arthur resolved to follow this true course. His friend, Mr. Short, would have done the very same, in his own case, if possible. But he, as a clergyman, must not suffer fools to undermine his influence.

Fearing to have brought upon her father not only unpleasant

recollections, but sad perplexities imminent, Rose Arthur was delighted to find him as cheerful as usual, on the following day. He listened, with interest and amusement, to the thousand and one things she had to tell, about her first great party; and he said, that he hoped it would not be very long, before she had another little change, to make her lively.

"No, papa, no; I want no more, for a very, very long time indeed," she answered; "and I was so vexed at what happened last night, because—because I know, that you dislike to be disturbed so."

"It was no disturbance, my dear child. I am glad, upon the whole, that it has happened so. Colonel Westcombe was most kind to you; and I wish that I could thank him better. But I do not in the least expect, that he will ever come again."

He said this with a smile, which seemed to Rose a very sad one. And she was grieved, more than she liked to show, at such a conclusion to her sudden friendship, though she would not ask, why it must be so.

"There are reasons, which I cannot explain to you, my dear," Mr. Arthur continued, as he understood her glance, "which prevent me from having any intercourse with the man, whom of all in this part of the world, and I may even say in the entire world, I respect, and admire, and like the best. If circumstances should entirely change, or even without that, if I should be taken with dangerous illness, it would become my duty to explain everything to you; or if I should be taken from you suddenly, all the particulars will be found in writing, as I have told you once or twice. Now, for the work of the day, my darling. Busy hands make happy minds. The storm of last night has done good, upon the whole, and the air is beautifully soft to-day. But there must be a lot to do in the little vineyard; and I think I must call upon you to help. The wind is the worst foe the vine has in this country; though the May-frosts are worse than wind, in the east of England. In any part of Southern England, where those bitter May-frosts do not prevail, it is my firm belief that, with proper care and skill, and experience as to the right sort to grow, a much finer table-grape can be got, out-of-doors, than you can buy in Germany, or the northern half of France; and for this simple reason, that ——"

"Come, dear father, you like to deliver that lecture after supper. And you will be angry with yourself, and me too, if we stop to have it now—for it always lasts an hour—when we ought to be hard at work, in Naboth's vineyard. It is the first time you have

ever had the manners to invite me, to do a bit of work there—you are so jealous! I quite understand it. There are plants of mine, that you dare not touch, in your most audacious moment. However, I will go and get my 'tuck-ups,' as you call them, and overtake you in two seconds. But what am I to sit upon—the ground?"

"Never mind about that. There are flower-pots there, that your stupid Pugsley brought, only fit to sit upon; and some of them kick up, even so. There never was a pot of sense, till I invented mine, and had them made. And even, after that, the clay was so inferior, and they were kilned in such a doltish manner——"

The rest of this lamentation passed out of hearing, as the puffs of the captain's pipe flitted through the bright air, while he was marching away among his pear-trees, and glancing at the increase of their hopes. The fresh remembrance of the rain was on them, sparkling still from some cupped leaf; and the new shoots of summer were embrowning slowly their thick sappy green, into the dignity of rind. In sturdy little sheaves, were the young pears standing, with the gorgets of their eyes pricked up like cloves, and the bronzing of the sun, and air, shed round their sides already. Others, of the long curved stalk, and pensive habit, hung their heads, with paler tints generally, and more grey upon their oval drops.

Thankful as a gardener is, at the prospect of a noble crop, he is anxious also that it should not fail, through failure of his grumbling. Right well he knows, through vast experience, what blows descend from heaven upon his first indulgence in a vaunt; and grateful as he is, beyond mankind, he humbly secretes his gratitude. "What a lot of thinning there will be to do! We shall never get through it;" cried Mr. Arthur.

"Won't we, though? I can do a score of trees before breakfast, any fine morning," his daughter answered, as she overtook him; "and even you acknowledge, that I understand that work. We ought to be only too glad, to have to do it. But it goes to my heart, at every tap, to see the little darlings hopping on the ground. Now shall I go on to Jezreel, or begin it?"

"I will not have my little nook called 'Naboth's Vineyard.' The confusion of ideas is too feminine. Am I, the owner, envious of my own ownership, because I shut out clumsy people? The only analogy, that can be imagined, would set you down first as an Ahab."

"Very well, dear, if that will please you better, it shall be Solomon's Vineyard, such as he describes—I believe, somewhere. And I will be the Queen of Sheba, come to see it. Only you must have the manners, in that case, to provide me with at least a sound flower-pot, to sit upon, instead of one of your break-downs. And none of your sound ones have got anything to sit upon. Oh! papa, you are so clever, do invent something that is not all holes."

"The special virtue of my pots is this," Mr. Arthur stopped short, when he began upon that, although in a great hurry to get on; "that they are all holes, or at any rate contrived so that you can tell, at a glance, what is going on inside. There is a very clever Frenchman, of the name of Beaumont, who has found a man endowed with a window in his digestive organs, by means of a bullet, or a grapeshot. He is thus enabled to ascertain—but never mind, my dear, you are too young, as yet, for inquiries of pure science. And I would not have hinted at the—well I may call it, the troublesome part of the human system—except to elucidate my theory of pots. There are three essential qualities in a flower-pot, to begin with; and there are fifteen of less, but still important consideration——".

"Her be coming, her be coming, at a rattle," Moggy, the maid, came hotly shouting; "shall us let 'un in, or shall us shut 'un out?"

"Who is it, that causes you so much excitement, Moggy?" her master asked, with some little vexation, for he was just warming up to his subject, with the pleasure of the vines in prospect; "I have no time to see any one."

"Her ladyship, Lady Tichwudd; I knowed that bragian boy in front, as looketh daown on his own kearful moother. No room for he, in my kitchen. I was vorced to box the ears of 'un last time."

"Do it again, if needful, Moggy. We will go, and meet Lady Touchwood, at the gate. Her carriage cannot cross the stream. Come, Rose, and thank her for her kindness to you yesterday."

"Keep the horses exercised for one hour, and then be here again, to see if I am ready," Mr. Arthur, and his daughter, heard the order given, as they came back reluctantly to the drawbridge, and beheld their visitor, with the page behind her, crossing the space between the river and the lane. "Ah, how pleased I am to see you!" she exclaimed, as the captain lowered his plank, and politely led her across it; "I scarcely expected such good luck. And darling Rose,

how well you look! It was very dull yesterday for you, I fear. But you would run away so. There was to have been a little dance, if the weather had only been propitious—what my son Richard will call a 'hop;' and then perhaps somebody would not have run away so, or at any rate would not have been allowed the chance. I know one, who would have pleaded very hard; and he generally manages to get his own way. How ingenious it was about all those fish! I never saw so many, and how fresh they were! And how wonderfully you did cook them, dear! Canon Botrys made a splendid joke, so Mrs. Botrys herself told Julia, who between you and me, captain, is a trifle jealous. The canon said, 'that young lady dresses fish, almost as well as she dresses herself.' Not so very bad for a dignitary of the Church. And he stuck to his plate, till he got wet through. And then Julia, who understands all the foreign tongues, said—'give him some extra sec to dry him.' Upon the whole, it was very pleasant, except for that abominable rain. But I never heard how you got home, my dear. You must not think it remiss, on my part. All was such desperate confusion, in the storm."

"Oh, I got home beautifully, Lady Touchwood. Colonel Westcombe brought Miss Perperaps to her own house; and then he brought me to my father's gate."

"Oh, indeed! What a gallant old officer! It seems to me that Colonel Westcombe does almost everything. And I suppose, his son was with him, too. A very polite young man, I believe; though with very little to say for himself."

"We did not want him to talk," Rose answered, with a little flush of anger on her cheeks; "what we wanted, or at least what he wanted, was, to bring us safely through the dark stormy night, and the dangerous roads, which he ventured on for our sake. And he did it; though he must have been half-blinded by the rain. Very few people could have done it, I am sure."

"My son is a noble whip, and he faces any weather. But I made him come inside; for he is not of coarse fibre. And even so, I fear, that he has taken a sad cold. Ever since that sad calamity on your premises, he has caused me great uneasiness. Perhaps no other young man, in the world, could have survived it. But he is of such elastic tissue, and unusual harmony of juncture,—as an eminent medical authority pronounced, before he was breeched (I beg your pardon for the word), that he seems to rise superior to all trials."

"Let us hope, then," said Mr. Arthur very kindly, "that he will soon throw off his cold. Shall we go into my little sitting-room,

which cherishes a memory of pipes, I fear? Or would you like to rest a little, in my summer plant-house, which is thrown open now, and has no sun upon it?"

"No, if I may choose, I would rather be in doors. Under glass, I should have an expectation, every moment, of my son coming tumbling in upon me. And I do not object to the smell of tobacco. Sir Joseph, in his few angel-visits to the park, calls for his pipe immediately. And my beloved son tries very hard to do it. Such associations consecrate a smell, however nasty."

"You prove again the well known truth of the unselfishness of ladies," Mr. Arthur answered, with a smile more genial, than any he had yet vouchsafed her. For nothing but the stiffness of his manner, and the fence of distant courtesy, had kept this lady from breaking into the coveted circle of his own affairs. While, according to the laws of nature, she held him in tenfold esteem, and viewed him with a hundred-fold of interest, because she could not get at him; "but my Rosie sees that this room is well-aired; and the door into the greenhouse keeps it fresh."

"I call it charming—a lovely little room," Lady Touchwood declared, as she tied her parasol up; "and the flowers that come tapping, tapping, as somebody, perhaps Lord Byron, says. Julia loves him; but my son Richard, who has Grecian features, and should be a judge, pronounces his morality imperfect. However, I never read such subjects. What's the use of rhyme? We don't talk in rhyme; and it must take a dreadful lot of time to make it. Oh, I should so like to take that moss-rose to my son! May I ask your daughter to go, and cut it for me? We can't grow moss-roses at Touchwood Park."

While Rose ran away on this little errand, the visitor told Mr. Arthur briefly, that she was come to speak about his dear child, and could not do it in her presence. So another commission was found for Rose, and she went about it gladly.

"You have thought it very strange of me, to come so early," Lady Touchwood resumed, when the coast was clear, "but oh, Captain Arthur, you can make allowance for the deep anxieties of a mother. Tired as I was, after all the fag of yesterday—for, in simple truth, those parties are a dreadful plague—not a wink of sleep could I get last night, with perpetual worry about my darling boy. He never used to know his own mind at all; and that was so delightful of him. But now, I fear that his heart is fixed irretrievably, irre—something, I never can remember those big words, something like bad play at whist."

"Irrevocably, perhaps?" asked the captain with a bow; "but, excuse me, perhaps that is not the word."

"That is the word to a nicety, and I suppose there is no English for it. Irrevocably fixed his poor young heart is, upon your very charming daughter. Now, don't say a word until I have finished; and then we shall understand each other. I could have wished it otherwise, as I need hardly say; although I confess it would be difficult to find a nicer, a more charming, a more lady-like young lady. Her behaviour yesterday was simply perfect; for she scarcely said anything, and all she did was useful. Many of the very highest people were quite captivated with her. What a sweet, pretty thing she had got on! I am sure it must have been made in Paris. My daughter Julia was quite put out; and it pleased me to see, how well she bore it."

"Excuse my saying that Miss Touchwood, in her style, is above all possibility of rivalry." Mr. Arthur felt that politeness called for this, after all those gratifying praises of his daughter.

"No doubt, that was her own opinion. Julia never under-rates herself; as my son Richard always does. People make a great mistake, on that account. They positively think that my son Richard is below the average of intellect. Because he is modest, and conceals his gifts, he is supposed not to have them. But how could he conceal them, if he had not got them? Now that is sound reasoning, as you must perceive. Even Mr. Short, with all his chatter about logic, could never get out of such an argument as that. Yet people keep on saying, that we ladies cannot argue!"

"There can be no greater mistake," replied the captain; "it should rather be said, that ladies can argue always."

"I am so glad that you agree with me, because it saves so much reasoning; and excitement does not suit me now. I consider you infinitely superior, in the style of your mind, to Mr. Short; who has the nastiest way of putting things. And I have always found the military far more reasonable than the clericals. Now, you have been an officer, haven't you, Captain?"

"Well!" said Mr. Arthur, who could not help smiling, for the turn was sudden, even for a lady; "it would be very unpolite on my part, to decline a lady's commission."

"It is not curiosity that makes me ask, nor any inferior sentiment; but a lofty sense of duty only. The daughter of an officer, whether he has fought for his country, or whether he has been more fortunate, stands upon a social level, which—which is very excusable, for any rank to fall in love with her. But Captain Arthur, if this

is to go on, you would, I trust, leave off gardening. It is a very amiable peculiarity, especially if you lose money by it; which elevates it above trade, and makes it quite respectable. You must not feel hurt, at my expressions, but to have your name upon a basket—what would the County families say?"

"I have not considered the subject yet, from that point of view, which is a new one to me. But would the County families pay for all I should lose, in the way of wicker-work?"

"I fear not; for they are dreadful screws. They sell their grapes, and pine-apples, but they object to the appearance of their names. However, you might have a private mark, a star, or a lion, or your family crest; so we might get over that objection. But you must come out of your retirement, Captain Arthur; your seclusion, I might even call it. You must resume your rank, and visit people."

"Lady Touchwood, you mean well, and kindly. And I am bound to hear, what you have to say, not only with the courtesy due to a lady, but also with some gratitude. For you have not touched on one point, which would have been the foremost, with many ladies placed as you are. You have not spoken of my poverty. Of that I am not ashamed—for no one need be—still it is kind of you, not to refer to the difference in worldly goods between us; and for that, I respect, and like you. And that makes it far more difficult for me to say, what I must say, before we understand each other."

"If it is anything about—about any misunderstanding, between you and the law, surely we can get it put to rights. Sir Joseph has such influence, in the very highest quarters."

"No, there is nothing of that kind," he replied, with a smile that was perfectly convincing; "I have never done anything felonious. My seclusion is of my own seeking. What I have to say, is about your son, who is a most amiable, and lively youth. He brought a new spirit into our dull round; and we all missed him greatly, when he left us. But if there were no other obstacles, (although, as you clearly see, there are plenty,) there is a fatal one at the outset. The character of your son is not formed yet. He is volatile, versatile, clever in his way; but a perfect boy, at present."

"That is exactly what his father says," Lady Touchwood answered, with unwonted self-control; "but youth is a fault that will right itself. You will not condemn him, on that account."

"It is a fault that should right itself, before marriage, and even before an engagement is formed," Mr. Arthur said decisively; "unless the lady is of strong commanding spirit, and can shape her lord. My little Rosie is gentle, sensitive, warm-hearted, loving, and

impetuous sometimes, but never inclined to be imperative. She is wholly unsuitable for your son."

"Then am I to understand, Mr. Arthur, that you decline to have anything to do with my Dicky?"

"By no means; I am always glad to see him; and indeed I have a hunt in view for him. But concerning of my daughter, as the people say here, it is not to be thought of; and I can trust her."

Lady Touchwood looked at him, with anger in her eyes, and the vertical lines of temper, on her forehead, deepening into a puzzle of dismay. She wanted to say the rudest thing that she could think of, and cast about for it, and would have found it, if the eyes of her antagonist had either flashed, or wavered. But the captain regarded her, from his superior height, with a gaze of good will, not only philosophical, but of the very finest breeding. "He must be somebody. Perhaps he is a lord! He would jump at Dicky, unless he was a lord," were the ponderings of her mind, which made her humble.

"I am sure, Captain Arthur, that you mean it for the best." She relapsed, from the baffled issue of great wrath, into the commonplace, as hot people do. "You are the best judge upon such matters. You have seen a vast deal of the world, that is certain, from the common sense, of what you say. Nobody gets common sense, without it. I am disappointed. I can say no more. My son is an exceedingly interesting young man; and hitherto nobody has been able to resist him. He is so much accustomed to have his own way; this will be a bitter blow to him."

"And it will do him good, a weight of good, a world of good. You will have cause to be glad of this little check to his rapidity. Ladies have such sympathy with love-affairs, that they scarcely ask how they will react upon themselves. If your son were engaged, before he is a man, what peace would you ever have with him? Every day, he would vow to be married to-morrow."

"That is true enough," said Lady Touchwood. "How you have understood his brave nature!"

"Then, if you let him marry, what would come of it? His bride would be everything, while she was a bride; and he would even be rude to his dear mother. Let him wait, ten years, Lady Touchwood; and he will be a man by that time; or at any rate, he ought to be."

"Your advice is excellent," the lady answered; for some of her tenderest feelings had been touched. "Dicky is already very difficult to manage. And if he had a wife to encourage him, my condition

would be dreadful, as you say. I quite agree with you, that he should wait for many years. But I have such a dread of his being entangled by some objectionable person ; and he turns up his nose against girls with money. There is a most charming girl, Chrysolite Moneywig ; not half so nice as your daughter, I admit, because she is captious, and conceited, and a prig, and thinks too much of literature, and she dresses according to the poets always ; which is the most absurd thing, with a hundred thousand pounds. However, I could keep her down, no doubt : because she must be a foolish thing. But Dicky is afraid of her ; and she won't have him, unless he should happen to be senior wrangler. And he doesn't seem to care to be that sort of thing."

"Never mind ; let him act according to his lights," Mr. Arthur answered, with a cheerful smile. "You are happy in having a son, Lady Touchwood, who is healthy, active, and easily pleased, and as frank as the day, about everything. Such natures are happiest in the long run ; for they seldom fall into great depth of trouble. He will soon get over this, and be as bright as ever."

"But will you break it to him? He has been so plaguesome. Yesterday something made him frightfully jealous. And you have more influence with him, than any one. He always speaks of you so highly."

"Certainly, I will ; if you wish me to do so. I will be gentle with him ; as I need not tell you. And it is better to act at once, decisively."

With this understanding, Lady Touchwood left, feeling more good will towards Mr. Arthur than could have been expected in so delicate a case.

CHAPTER XXVI.

PERILOUS ENTERPRISE

WHENEVER a thing begins to move, it is wonderful how it will go on. There was a man in Devonshire, who lay in bed, as his own wife said of him, for one and twenty years, with no other reason than because he liked it, and found his constitution thrive. He enjoyed a pension, from the British crown, of twelve shillings a week, paid quarterly ; because his father—much against his own desire—had received a bullet intended for a member of the royal

family. It appears, that the fate of the parent dwelled, with singular force, upon the filial mind ; and the son reasoned justly, that as his dear father had brought on his decease, by standing up, he of the next generation might avoid the like result, by lying down. It is impossible to penetrate into the human mind ; and this man's motive, or determination not to move, may have been even larger. However, there he was for thrice seven years ; and the neighbourhood respected him, because he did no work. And he might have been there now, if he had only stuck fast. But there came a new curate, of uneasy mind, who fancied that this man was neglecting duty, and who would rouse him up to a sense of his position. He made him get half-way up at first, and look out of the window, and see the river ; and with six months of energy, he stirred him up into his breeches, which were hanging on a peg by the door ; like mildewed stirrups, when the horse is dead. Even a pensioner may thus be killed. The poor fellow saw the churchyard, from a window going downstairs, and shook his head ; for he preferred a pillow to a tomb-stone. For a few days, he exerted some reluctant steps, and then became a walking funeral.

So it is also with the rest of us, who must get out of bed, because we have no pension. When once we get out of the tranquil horizontal, into the whirl of the vertical state, we are hurrying ourselves, very much against our own desires, to a larger world. Neither is that, however bad it may be, by any means the worst of it. For we have provoked, into a restless mood, things that are only too glad to have some excuse, for not standing still on us. With sudden alacrity, they begin to slide ; and like sticks in an avalanche, we go too.

The perception of this great truth was clearer, in the ancient times, than it is to-day. We find it consistently impressed upon us, by the chorus in Greek plays, by Pindar also, and the wise Theognis, and the genial Herodotus. Hence, with flowing weight, it descends into the grand lines of Lucretius, the torrent of Catullus, and the sudden turns of Horace. And there used to be plentiful sense of it with us, till loftier science took command of sense.

Now, Mr. George Gaston was a very able man, and one of great activity ; therefore he laughed at the maxim of antiquity, *quieta noli movere ;* which is, in our vernacular, "let sleeping dogs lie." He had roused up sleeping dogs, to make them follow him ; and at first they seemed to do so, without troubling him to whistle. But before very long, they began to sniff about, and make little excursions on their own account.

In this man's arrogant inroad on Mr. Tucker, he had been guilty of the old mistake of supposing, that Devonshire people are thick-headed, with a thickness that leaves no space inside. It is not to be denied that their skulls are solid ; but every melon-grower will maintain that the substance of his rind has its own advantage, and enhances the coolness of the choice contents. Therefore it would have been a more sagacious act on the part of Gaston, to have kept his temper, poured graceful praises on his host's glass drum-sticks, and cordially departed, with a hope to come again.

Not that this excellent old gentleman, retired from the timber-trade, fostered any twist of sap about it. His grain was good, and he would cut up well ; and before he was cut up, or even cut down, he was a fine piece of maturity, and sound at core. The impertinence of his red-faced guest was gone from his mind, when he said his prayers, that night. And when it was brought up again, the next day, by some indignation of his sister, Mr. Tucker only said, that such a class of persons was below the contempt of right-minded people. And the only thing that acted on his mind at all, was a doubt whether it might be his duty, to write to the gentleman on Dartmoor, and tell him, that some low fellow was inquisitive about him. But doubting lets the time go by ; and time went by, without a letter to deliver.

All this was according to the manner of mankind ; who, when worthy of the name, cast off as a plaguesome burden, little enmities. But even as a man may kill his own queen-wasps, and bring in their bodies, and have them pitied ; so, if he is too magnanimous to kill them, somebody will set forth, to do that duty for him, and probably it will be a lady.

Mrs. Giblets, and her daughter Mary, when they heard what the high-coloured man had said, and done, longed only to run after him, and pull him off his horse. But finding that he was gone too far, for any chance of laying hands on him, they consoled themselves with some fine old proverbs, whose pith was, that their time would come. And so it did, to their own great amazement ; although they had been so confident about it. For it happened that the whilom Mayoress of Barum (whose Mary had been born into a silver cradle, as well as with a silver spoon in her mouth) possessed a sister of a wandering turn, who, after many ups and downs, had turned up well. That is to say, she had married a man for the third time—not the same man, of course ; though such a thing has happened, in these cycles of divorce—and the third time was lucky, as it ought to be. Husband No. 3 made up for 1, and 2,

who had gone to their rest at the public expense ; for although he had entered on the matrimonial stage, with more courage than cash, he obtained his reward. He invested £5, on his very wedding-day, reasoning well that he could not be hit both ways ; and only keeping fifteen shillings, for the outlay of the honeymoon. Fortune repaid his manly confidence so briskly, that his £5 turned into five and twenty, before he got his first uxorial wigging ; that is to say, within three days. For that was the golden era of the railway rush, when even solid heads were spinning, and generally got the worst of it, in clashing with the light ones. In a few months, Mr. Snacks was worth more than five and twenty thousand pounds ; then he got in his cash, invested in safe mortgages, which were almost going begging, bought a nice house near Regent's Park, and only kept a small amount in speculation.

Mrs. Snacks had always borne in mind the kindness of her brother, Mr. Tucker, and her sister, Mrs. Giblets ; both of whom had helped her, to the best of their convenience, in the bygone days of poverty. And now she longed to make them some return, as well as to show them her new house, and prove to Mr. Snacks what she had always said—that she belonged to a family, he might be proud of. Also there was a little Snacks by this time, the first fruit of the lady's triple conjunction, and he seemed sometimes to languish for lack of admiration. Neither was it utterly beyond the book of fate, that some of the pleasant timber-merchant's money might be directed, by a hospitable turn, towards his godson, the junior Snacks. Mr. Tucker however declined stage-coaching, and could not bear the jolting of the rail beyond it ; which the driver of the *Quicksilver* declared would kill a bull. His sister, being younger, might attempt it, if she chose ; and Mary could never have enough see-saw. Therefore, these two accepted invitations ; and a swing was put up in the old walnut-tree, to bring them into training for the tossings of the line.

It must have been the middle of July, when they were ready ; and they all wept heartily, when they said "good-bye." The travellers took a cask of salted butter, three Devonshire hams, and a round of spiced beef, and asserting (to assure themselves) their confidence in Heaven, set forth upon this enterprise of ambition, and audacity.

After many marvels, and a vast prolongation of their lives—if life, as is now contended, can be measured only by perceptive jerks, —these two positively were in London ; and they thought so little of it, that their minds were gone. They would not say a word, to

hurt the feelings of Aunt Snacks, who set this down to their abashment; but as soon as she was gone, they declared in one breath, that Exeter was much the finer city; and that London was all trees, and little windows, and big spikes, without any Fore-street, for the folk to come together.

And the more they saw of our vast metropolis, the less they thought of it, and the more they wanted to be back again, in a town where they knew the people. There was nobody, in this stuck-up place, even to touch his hat to them; and although they never looked for it around their house at home, they liked to have it done, and contrived to let their tradesman know, if his young men failed to do it. They felt that they were downright strangers here, and could not expect to be saluted, and must get accustomed to be passed, like posts. They saw that it was reasonable; but they did not like it.

To the acclimatized urban mind (degenerating into the less urbane), few things are more wondrous, than the memories of their "country cousins." If a genuine Yorkshire, or Devonshire man—before the railways spoiled them both—ever espied, in a country lane, a Londoner trying to enjoy himself, and met him again, after changeful years, as a cock upon his own—or rather let us say, as a gentleman treading his own street, the rustic would hail him, and invite him to a parley, and tell him what his hat and waistcoat were, when faded from the owner's memory. That gentleman's large heart might be fervent with great business; but the other would never let him go, until he declared that he remembered all about it.

When Mrs. Giblets, and her daughter Mary, walking in a broad North-western street, suddenly espied the red-faced man, they did not by any means act thus; but endeavoured to preserve their dignity. They gave one another a nudge, to point perception, and enjoin discretion; and then they walked past him, with their bonnets turned aside, and their countenances lost in many ribands of eclipse. Mr. Gaston caught a glimpse of bright country colour, and marched on, none the wiser. But they, with a spirit beyond their wont, and inspired perhaps by the air of town, turned, and at sagacious distance followed, to see what became of that very odious man. To find out where he lived, would be a precious feather in their cap; for Mr. Tucker had reproached himself, over and over again, for letting that visitor go, without knowing more about him.

'Mary, you leave it all to me. But your eyes are more younger like." Mrs. Giblets spoke with some excitement, because she was

obliged to walk rather fast, and she had just been enjoying a long look at a turtle, as the relict of a mayor was bound to do, and she had longed to go in, and tell them who she was; and afterwards it made her sigh to walk, not for two thoughts of the animal, but only from remembering what her husband said, when the silver cradle was sent home, with a lace coverlet, and a Bristol turtle in it; for if any one knew how to do things well, the Barnstaple people in those days did. "Mary, you push on afront; he wouldn't know you again, so soon as me; because you be scarcely come to any size yet; and his cousin, Sir Courtenay, had acquaintance of your father, unless he were a story-teller, which I do believe of him. Keep you on, my dear, because you are so limber; and you may surely count on me behind—the same as they put the pelisses here—to come a long way afterwards. But be sure that you walk fittily."

Mary, like a child, was proud as Punch, to be so important, and to walk alone in the perilous streets of London; however, she preserved discretion, and walked fittily, even when her dear mamma was a hundred yards behind her. For the red-faced man strode along at good speed; and short Devonshire legs had to go two for one, to keep him anywise in view.

At length, in a place where the street narrowed into a road, without windows on either side, Mr. Gaston stopped, at a door in a high wall, unlocked it, and entered, and slammed the door behind him. A little further on, there were large folding gates, with real timber trees overhanging them; such an entrance to a mansion standing back in its own grounds, as Mary had seen in the outskirts of Exeter, but did not expect to find in London. "It must be some very great man that lives there, a nobleman at least, and perhaps a prince," Mary Giblets said to her mother, when she met her coming round the corner with an anxious heart; "don't cough, mother, or he will hear you. I dare say he is inside the wall, now just. He looked back once, and I thought I should have dropped. It was just the way he looked at me, when I skipped through the stile of the little ham, where the bull was."

"Don't you be put upon your ropes, my dear," Mrs. Giblets answered calmly, though her clothes were hot; "if it is a prince as lives behind this wall, it never can be Red-face himself. He may be the butler, or the man-cook; for you heard what your Uncle Snacks said yesterday. They keep a man to roast and boil, in London, because of their complexions being cooler. And like enough, that is why he hath a ruddy countenance. But come you

in here, and have a bun, dear heart. It is a little shop; and I love a little shop, because it looks like double-bakes. And if they don't know nothing else in London, they know better than hath visited our country, how to keep the glasses and the plates together."

These two ladies were not only thirsty, as ladies nearly always are, but also hungry to a very large extent. For the air of London, with its fine circulation, brings into the upper stomach of the recent visitor a very delightful (although to the slower mental faculties mysterious) recognition of prime joints, revolving at the bright well-springs of all that smoke. Possibly, that is not the cause, or only one among many; but the upshot is the same. When people from the country come to London, they are hungry at the end of every street, or sometimes at the beginning.

"I don't know why I should ask, I am sure," Mrs. Giblets said to the pastry-cook, as he would have been called in Devonshire; "for we have such a number of large houses in our parish; but do you happen to know, sir, who lives across the road, inside that hall? It looks so respectable, and rare in London."

"I conclude, ma'am," answered the pastry-cook, "you are only just come from the country?"

"Well, sir, yes; to some extent. But we know a great deal about London ways; and every day makes a difference. We are accustomed to a city; and this does not seem to be one."

"You are right, ma'am. We are quite in the country here. Two and eightpence; fourpence change."

"But you should not speak with so much haste. Mary, my dear, look in my purse. I thought I put down three and sixpence. There was four and sixpence in that end. Oh no, I see; I beg your pardon, sir. But you have not told me, who lives in there."

"Well, ma'am, that is easier asked than answered; for they shut themselves up, like a convent almost, instead of doing any good to trade. But the house belongs to Lord Delapole; and, for all I know, he may be living in it."

"But surely you must know. You must feel some interest. I do not ask, out of mere curiosity. We happen to have some knowledge of a gentleman, who has just gone in, at the door up there. He paid us a visit, not so very long ago."

"Oh, you know Mr. Gaston, do you? A very nice gentleman, no doubt. Ladies, you had better go, and ask him yourselves about his business; for he knows it best."

"How horribly rude these London people are!" Mrs. Giblets exclaimed, as they walked away. "They positively seem to care

no more about you, the moment they have got your two and eightpence. However, we know the place now, Mary, dear; and we will set your Uncle Snacks to work. He must be the cleverest man in London, to have made such a fortune, in such a horrid place."

CHAPTER XXVII.

HEARTY KINDNESS.

If ever anything has been proved to the satisfaction of mankind, it would seem to be their assimilation to the substance wherein they deal. A man who desires to improve his character, or confirm his principles (when he finds them beginning to be honest) must strictly withhold his steps from many paths of life, that should be straight, but only run straightway down-hill. Why are the greatest statesmen of the age far beyond credence of the most credulous? Because they have so long handled liars, that they follow their turns, and fall into them. Why is the most eminent British general inclined to quake, when returning thanks, on behalf of our noble army? Not because he ever felt fear himself; but from handling so many short-service soldiers, fugitive as a cheap French jelly.

On the other hand, to deal in good stiff stuff, sets a man up, and puts core into him. A man who sells wire-netting, when requested to quote lowest prices, at wholesale rate, by post to-morrow (after a long interview, and a half inclination to come down), stiffens up again, and writes—"Dear sir; We are sorry to have quoted our price too low. Upon examination of our books we find"—something having entry in his conscience only. Whereas a good dealer in soft woollen nets can scarcely refuse any reasonable offer.

Throughout the years, which Mr. Caleb Tucker had spent in honest business, the timber chiefly in demand was oak. For every sort of work that was meant to last, in exposure to the wind and rain, people insisted upon having oak; and the blessings of free-trade (which, like those of Isaac, have descended upon the wrong head hitherto) had not yet filled our walls with cracks, and our diaphragms with quaking. This power of material had helped to consolidate Mr. Tucker's character, so that he could read the most important letters, without losing half a mouthful of his breakfast.

"Dear Uncle Caleb," said the one upon the table, "mother, and

I want, oh so sadly, to be home again with you! There are no cob-walls here, and no flowers, unless you pay a lot of money for them; and a little cracked cabbage you would take to the pig-sty, costs twopence halfpenny, and impudence too. There are plenty of nice people, but they live so far apart, that you may go miles without seeing them; and even then, they have no time to spare."

"What a number of complaints—poor little Mary!" Uncle Caleb muttered, at the bottom of three pages; "well, it will teach them to enjoy their home. Halloa! What is this? I must read slowly."

"We have come across a thing, that you ought to know; and I am afraid that I cannot tell it clearly. Do you remember that gentleman, who came on horseback, in the spring, and behaved so badly? You were quite upset by his bad manners, because you would not answer all his crooked questions. You doubted very much, whether he had given his right name; and you talked about going to the gentleman on Dartmoor; but old Jerry fell so lame, that you could not do it; and you said that you did not like to write about it. It seems that his name was right enough, and better than his nature, as we say. We met him on the streets, about a week ago, and found out where he lives, and all about him. He seems to be a steward, or agent, or whatever it is, to a wealthy nobleman, who has a great house, all walled in, almost like a country place. And he is a very strange man, they say, and may go off at any time. Uncle Snacks knows a great deal about him, because of his being in the railway line; and this lord will not let them come through a field of his, without fighting for it. He seems to have no one to care about him, except the servants, and it makes him fret; for he lost his grandson a little while ago, a fine boy, but he caught the small-pox. And not so very long ago, he had lost his son, the father of his grandson; and they say that he has another son somewhere, who disgraced himself shockingly, back in the war-time, and never could get on with his father. But now Mr. Gaston tends the whole of his concerns, they say, and he is accounted unusual honest; although they live like cats and dogs, for his lordship has a temper, and so has Mr. G. Uncle Snacks told me to write all this; and mother says no lawyer could have done it better."

"Neither he could," said Mr. Tucker, going to the fire, for some more hot fried potatoes; "though it requireth to be read again, to know which is which, of all them, 'he's.' 'Tis late in life for me to meddle with the concerns of other folk however. But here comes

different sign manual to the foot of it. Must have my thick specks, they new ones is like shop fronts."

With the help of his thick horn spectacles, which he was not allowed to wear on Sundays—and this was a Sunday, as his breakfast proved, for he had sausages with his fried potatoes—the dealer in oak, of former days, made out the thin scrawl of the jobber in shares, whose hand he had never seen before.

"Dear sir. If convenient, you should come up. Mary says, that you know all about things going on, I won't say where. Robbery, which might be regretted when too late, and worse things to come afterwards. With best respects, yours faithfully, John Snacks."

"Well! I did intend to go to church. And I will go to church, because I hear the bells," Mr. Tucker thought slowly, and with memories of childhood; "the best ideas always come in church, because they have no business."

He did as he had said, and came to this conclusion, that his duty by no means required him to go to London, upon other people's business; but that it might be a matter to repent of, if neglected altogether. Old Jerry (the only horse he owned at present), although getting better, was scarcely fit to climb stony places with a tender feeling; and his master, after looking at him in the afternoon, resolved to take the chariot of Pugsley, towards the heights of Christowell. Pugsley had no right to carry passengers for hire, and no one must go over Exe-bridge with him, unless it were a child of tender years, such as Rose Arthur used to be. But if Master Timothy discovered on the road a respectable wayfarer, looking weary, his manner was to ask him whether he would ride, in a social rather than commercial spirit; though it tended, by-and-by perhaps, towards half-a-crown.

The carrier, and the timber merchant, knew one another on the road of old, and cherished mutual respect. And Mr. Arthur, from time to time, had sent a present of fruit, or flowers, or honey, to his city friend, by good care of Pugsley. Therefore, after long discourse, and easy turns of summer lanes, Mr. Tucker was set down within a mile of Lark's Cot, in the early afternoon. Timothy would have gone further with him; but the old gentleman's legs were good, and as there was nothing in the cart for the captain, he would not work the old horse on. How to get home, was another question; but he was sure of hospitality.

"Why what a lovely place it is!" Mr. Tucker could not help exclaiming, as he crossed the little meadow, and descried the

cottage, nestled in with fruitful trees, and plumed with roses, and honeysuckles; "it was not like this, when I bought it for him, but looked all bleak and shivering. All the work of his own hands. Ah, that is the way to fence the world out. I wonder if they will let me in. Pugsley told me, to pull this wire."

He pulled the wire, and a bell, that hung outside the porch, made answer; and presently Moggy, the maid, came out, with an apron over her head, because she had curled her hair on Sunday; and after a parley in broad dialect, she went to look for her master, up the stream. In a very short time, Mr. Tucker was resting in the pleasant bower by the brook, while the captain was opening a bottle of cider, and Rose was gone to the house, to speed the prospects of an early dinner.

"I am heartily glad to see you once more, in the place that owes everything to you," Mr. Arthur said, as he filled a long bright glass, with brighter liquid. "You see, that I am quite a native now, and trying to advance upon the native ways. Tell me what you think of that. A perfect cure for gout, and rheumatism. How many kinds of apples are there in it?"

"Well, perhaps twenty; or there might be fifty," Mr. Tucker replied, with the fresh colour flowing into his cheeks, and a polish on his lips; "it is fine enough for fifty, as we say."

"Three, and no more," said the captain slowly, and with stress upon every word; "three, and no more, is the secret, or at least the main secret, of the way to do it. But who knows an apple from a pippin here, or a pippin from a crab, or a crab from a service? You may talk for ever; but they only know, that 'their veythers always did this, or thiccy; and they don't need to be no wiser than their veythers was.' They admit that mine is better; they can't help doing that; and if any one is ill, they send for it. But as for budging out of their own ways, or trying to learn one tree from another—they tell me, they actually have told me several times, that it goes against Genesis, and the Parables!"

"Perhaps it is all the better for them,"—Mr. Tucker was a Tory of good type,—"to be contented with their ancient ways. They make it anyhow, and they drink it anyhow, and they thrive upon it soberly. But if their liquor was like this, they would soon be above their work, and be getting gout, for the sake of such a medicine. People are always gabbling now, about elevating everybody. Nobody knows what it means; and I would rather see them hanged; because there you are. Good health to you, my lord—for so I believe you are by this time."

"I have not received any notice of it; and hope that you may be mistaken, Mr. Tucker. It would be the worst thing, that could befall me. In the outer world at least."

"We never know, what is good for us;" it appeared to the timber-merchant, that it must be good to be a lord; "and I am too old to be carried away, by any ups and downs of life. But at first sight, sir, it looks like promotion; and I promised myself some pleasure, in offering first congratulations. But excuse my saying that you take peculiar views of things."

"No, Mr. Tucker, I do not. I look at things as every gentleman, and every man of honesty, in whatever station, must look at them. You know part of my story, but not all. When you know the whole, you will merely say, that in my place, you must have done the same. But tell me, what have you heard about me, or rather about my relatives?"

"It appears from this letter," the old man answered, spreading his niece's long epistle on his knee, and feeling (as a true Briton must) some pride in this connection with the peerage, "that your elder brother is dead, my lord; I have not the exact date of his death; but his departure from this world seems certain."

"I have heard of that. I avoid newspapers; as I have good cause to do. However, that came to my knowledge, through an accident. But before you go further, let me beg of you one thing, in which I am sure you will oblige me. Do not call me 'my lord;' but speak to me, just as you always used to do."

Mr. Tucker bowed, and smiled, and then proceeded. "Well, sir, I peruse the papers; as a man in my humble position must do. But I was not aware, until I got this letter, that your brother's only child was dead. He appears to have been carried off by small-pox. Sad indeed for any one, but most sad for the heir to an Earldom, and large property, where the railways want to come."

"I am grieved to hear it, for my father's sake, as well as the poor little boy's. Are you certain, that it is so?"

"If you will kindly take this, and read it, you will know as much as I know. The women may pick up things amiss. But brother Snacks must be an accurate man, to have made all his money; and he backs it up."

Mr. Arthur took the letter, and read the part of Mary's writing that concerned himself, and the brief lines of the new-found uncle, of whom Uncle Caleb felt dire jealousy already.

"Every word of it looks the truth," said Mr. Tucker; "though you never can tell nowadays. Mary is a truthful maid, as can be;

but that sort gets imposed upon. And what do you say to it now, if you please?"

"There may be a little exaggeration," the captain answered quietly; "there always is that, in a case of this kind. But most of it is true. Who is that Mr. Gaston? He paid you a visit, last spring, I see."

"Yes, and a fine sort of a visit. I should live behind a river, if such visitors were common. We did the best we could for him, in our unpretentious way; and I offered him refreshment, to the best of my ability; but he showed himself unworthy, and made light of my intentions, because I would not furnish him with all information about you. I ought to have written to you about it; but I thought it would be better, to come and see you; but somehow or other, the time went by; and I humbly ask your pardon for neglect."

"Not at all. It is most kind of you to come now. You knew quite well, that I would not see the man; and to hear of him, would only have annoyed me. But what in the world could he have wanted of me? Did he give you any idea?"

"I don't think that he wanted to see you, but to know for his own purposes, where to find you. Possibly to prevent other people from seeing you. But I will tell you what he said, that you may judge for yourself; after making all allowance for his off-hand style, and remembering that he would try, most likely, to deceive me."

Mr. Tucker took a pinch of snuff, to stimulate his memory, and then told his host, as correctly as need be, the purport of George Gaston's words about him.

"Did you hear what became of him, when he left you?" Mr. Arthur asked, after listening to this tale; "or whether he went on with his inquiries about me? Having contrived to find you out, he would be pretty sure to find me too."

"That is not so certain: for you live in a place so secluded; and he would not know your name. But I saw no more of him, and heard no more of him, until I got this letter. Only I have a suspicion, that he went to a firm of low land-jobbers, in the suburbs of St. Thomas. I met one of them in the timber-yard soon after—for I go there, now and then occasionally—and he called out to me, like a low fellow as he is, 'I say, old gentleman, can you give us a glass of rum?' Of course that proves nothing; but it struck me, at the moment, as a remarkable coincidence."

"You may depend upon it, you were right. He knew that I had bought land, through your good offices, and he seems to have known my purpose too. From such people, who know you, and

keep no doubt a jealous eye upon your doings, he would speedily discover, for a small fee, all they knew ; and then put them to find out what they did not know. I must act upon the presumption, that this man knows me, my name, my dwelling-place, and all about me. By the way, a thought strikes me—but I will find that out to-morrow. Now what can the motives of this Gaston be? A revengeful, malicious-looking man, you say? But I cannot have wronged him. His name is quite unknown to me."

"Well, sir, he must have some motive ; and you may be pretty sure, that it is a bad one. Perhaps to get your property for himself, and blacken you to the poor old nobleman."

"I do not see how it can be that. The property is in strict settlement. If all that you have heard is true, after my father's time, I must take it, if I choose to do so ; except the merely personal part, which is trifling, or at any rate, used to be so. I cannot see what this man can mean, by hunting me out, and then leaving me in the dark."

"Never mind, sir, you may be quite clear, that he means wrong, and you must take him for an enemy, a bitter, and crafty enemy. If he had meant to do the honest thing, he would have found you out by public means ; or if there was anything against that, he would have come to you like a man, as soon as he discovered you."

"No doubt he would ; if indeed he has discovered me ; and of that there cannot be much question." The captain looked around, as if he would like to know the opinion of his trees, at this cruel disturbance of their master, and to ask them whether they would break their hearts, at the loss of the man who loved them so. The trees however never turned a leaf.

"I am sure I cannot tell, sir," the timber-merchant said, while the other was reflecting sadly ; "you know best, what suits your life ; but if I may say so, without being rude, within the four seas there may be four men, and no more, that would be sorry to be found out so—to be called to great wealth, and a high position, and with a dear child to inherit it. Miss Rose has grown into the loveliest young lady ; and her manners are as lovely as herself. For one thing, you may thank the Lord, sir—if I am not to call you, by your proper title—and that is the opportunity you have had, of bringing up a sweet simple nature, without any of the spoilings of the world. She never would have been like what she is, if her lines had fallen among gay rich people."

"There is much truth in what you say, my friend. And you may

be sure that it has occurred to me; though nothing in the world could have spoiled my Rose. But it is on her account, that I am most perplexed. If it were not for that darling child, I could act according to my own wishes, which are very simple, and have long been shaped. But her interests must be thought of, more than my desires."

"Certainly they ought to be. No just man could think twice upon such a point as that." Mr. Tucker spoke decisively, and almost sternly; for he was a man of strong clear sense, and had often condemned, in his own shrewd mind, what he thought to be the sensitive weakness of the other. "You may have your own ideas," he continued, "and your own views of happiness, and contentment; upon which I have never ventured to intrude, in spite of your flattering confidence in me. For yourself, you have a perfect right to judge; but for others—however it is not my place——"

"No, it is not your place," Mr. Arthur answered, looking at the old man gratefully; "to offer advice, without a thorough knowledge of all that has happened to us. This you have never had, for various reasons: most of which are now gone by. You knew very little of my affairs; and yet, through some sympathy, you took my part."

"Ay, that I did; and I couldn't tell the reason, unless it was the trouble on the both of us. Your dear wife was dead; and mine was gone; and a faithful partner she had been. 'Caleb,' she used to say, 'never you be hard; it comes so easy to be hard; no fear of nobody neglecting that. But it needeth a man, to be soft, my dear.' Perhaps her meaned, that the women wasn't so. But goodness knows, she never meant no harm. There I be talking, as if I wasn't eddicated! All of us does, when we thinks of trouble; from the way we go on, in the natural times. And then you came, with your hat-band on; and there was no complaint outside your eyes. And I was dwelling upon ner, that moment."

The turn of the old man's mind had brought the long review of his own life up; and the captain, having much of his own to look back on, waited for his sigh, before speaking again. For the sigh of the old, is the spirit's adieu to a mournful subject, until next time.

"But we must have another talk about this cider," Mr. Tucker continued, to save abruptness; "it should be indeed a thing to talk of, if a stranger could beat all Devonshire, like this! When you have time, sir, whenever you have time, I shall be happy to meet you, on that subject; for I used to fancy that I understood it, and

I made an improvement in the presses once; and I ought to have had a patent for it."

"I hope to have many good talks about it; and especially about the best fruit for it," the captain answered briskly; "for the Devonshire apples puzzle me; partly by their local names, and their infinite variety, but still more, by their general badness. I can go on talking about fruit, for ever, when I find any one to care about the subject, which I scarcely ever do. I suppose, we are all born with a turn for something: however the turn of our lives may obscure it. But I see, by the top of the kitchen chimney, that our plain dinner is as ripe as a good fig. My daughter will call us, in about two minutes. You have walked far to-day, and you ought to be hungry; or at any rate, you must be tired, my good friend."

"Not as I knows of," Mr. Tucker answered; for Devonshire legs go up and down, by power of habit, without much strain. "But at my time of life, that comes afterwards, to think of."

"You shall not walk another step, to-night; except to my cottage, and a stroll by-and-by, if you fancy it, in my garden. We will make you as comfortable, as we can; and my Rosie is no bad hand at that. You have been a very true friend to us, Mr. Tucker. I never like to press my affairs upon any one; for we all make a great deal too much fuss, about ourselves. But if you would like to hear my little story, to which you have never had the key as yet, you would do me a favour by listening by-and-by; and even a greater one, by your advice upon it."

"Sir, I may say, though I am not curious, that I have very often longed to know it."

"Here comes my darling! She shall go to bed early. For I would not disturb her, on any account. And then, if you are not too tired, you shall know, what has driven me to this peculiar life; though I do not complain of it, and wish for nothing better. The happiest of mankind is he, who does what he likes, and yet works hard."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

JACK O' LANTERN.

JOHN SAGE had now spent several weeks in Colonel Westcombe's service, giving, and receiving the most lofty satisfaction. Without the warmest urgency, on the part of the piscicapturists (for a fish is not to be called a fish now, and everything connected with him is

pisci-something), the colonel never would have spared this wisest, and therefore best, member of the human race. But it had been felt on every side, that John was the only one who could do it; and even at Touchwood Park, it was whispered, that old Sage was the first to put it into Master Dicky's head. But John, with a guinea in the lining of his waistcoat, took a view of all of them; and walked away in silence. For, if so be, he had boasted much, he could have done no less than stand treat.

He was perfectly capable now of standing treat, and might have had credit for a side of bacon, at Betty Cork's shop in Christowell. But he shunned all extravagance, took his pint as usual, in exchange for good advice, and enjoyed his three-halfpenny rasher with his wife, when he came home on Sundays, to applaud Parson Short. And when he rode down the hill, from Dartymore desert, on the colonel's old grey pony, there might have been found in front of him, by insidious search beneath his old hill-coat, a bag of some capacity; not idly so endowed, but exerted to its utmost, to contain good things. For he had advised the colonel's cook, how to fetch her sweetheart round, when hankering after less peppery charms; and the female heart excels the male, in being grateful *gratis*. And, though the high principles of old John were far too prudent to accept the very sweetest essence of unlawful meat, and compelled him indeed to keep a sharp look-out, that nobody else did such a thing, he found himself enabled, with all imaginable honesty, to secure some peaceful tributes to domestic virtue. The colonel knew, that he went forth in marching order, on a Saturday, victualled for his camp that night, among the Pixies, and the Kists; which demanded body, and spirit too, in the liquid half of nourishment. And the only reason old John had, for putting his coat upon his bag, as he rode into Christowell, and buying, in a public manner, that rasher for three-halfpence, was that if he failed to do so, the hospitable feeling of his neighbours would compel his wife to give a tea-party, as soon as ever his back was turned.

If ever a man deserved such things, and better than the best of them, John Sage used to feel that man inside his own shirt, as he rode proudly down the hill. Full of the spirit of the moor (which always rushed upon him gloriously, as soon as he was off it), he despised these people, who had lain down here, like a pack of cowards, asleep all night, and were coming out now, in their shirt-sleeves, after being lathered by their wives—for the barber could not find soap for anyone, under a penny—to be shaved; and then (as if they had done a brave thing) would go back, and blow the

fellows, till the kettle boiled. And all of these, when they looked at John, considering where he had passed the night, instead of being critical of what he had in front of him, were almost afraid to say, "Marnin' to 'e, Maister!"

In such a lofty character, there scarcely should have been a single vestige of conceit. And knowing what he was, he strove his utmost, not to let other people know. But, with the usual wilfulness of fame, the less he spoke, the more she blew his trumpet; until he could scarcely have his pipe in peace, and was obliged to bar the door, before he filled it. And then he used to meditate upon his many dangers, and flourish his stick in self-defence, until he broke his pipe-stem. For Weist-Tor, where he had to pass the night of almost every Saturday, was enough to make a man enjoy existence, when he got away from it.

"Sage, I shall be glad to have a talk with you this evening," Mr. Short said, when he came out of church, one fine Sunday in August, with the congregation drawn up outside, for the secular postscript to his good Church-words; "come up about seven o'clock, if you can." This vicar, after learned and impartial research, had come to the definite conclusion, that Sunday ended at six p.m.

John Sage thought it hard, to go all that way, with his legs still bowed from so much saddle, and his supper, by that time, sure to be inside him. But his mind was up with admiration; for the sermon had not contradicted his opinions; and he saw that the parson meant no less than half-a-crown. So he promised to go; and in good time went, recalling to his mind that he never could have won his fine rise of wages, without the parson's word. Moreover, he valued Mrs. Aggett highly; and he knew that excessive self-respect was the only power that could have stopped her, from coming on a Sunday afternoon, to gather sweet particulars about the cook at Westcombe. Therefore he opened the vicarage gate, with a mind at once loyal, and lofty.

"How famously you look, John!" Mr. Short observed, as soon as the wisdom of the village was shown in; "you have recovered all the substance of your wrestling days. You used to be a fine hand at it, I am told, with a trick of the inner crook, of your own invention."

"Ay, sir, I have drowed a good few vormerly. But there bain't no wrastlin' fit to speak of now. Last time I went to see 'un, I were compelled for to up sticks."

"I can understand the wrath of a scientific hand. They tell me it is come to a mere bout of kicking. But you were the champion, at one time, Sage."

"No, sir, no. I wor not big enow for that. I could drow any man, within two stun of me. But there used to be men, as could take me up with one hand, and shake me like a handkercher. What use of playing, with such men as them? But their mothers never bring forth such men now."

"I am afraid that is true," said Mr. Short, considering himself with sadness; "I fear that we Englishmen get smaller, like onions sown where they grew last year. But, John, let us come down from such great subjects. You are doing very nicely over there, at Colonel Westcombe's?"

"Well, sir, I never complain. Vact is, I be too old, to begin complaining."

"Did you ever leave off, John?" the parson asked, with a quick look, such as he gave them in church, when he hit their thoughts, with his own almost. They always liked this, because it showed that they were men; and now old John grinned—which he very seldom did, else would his fame have been far smaller.

"A' maight be better; and a' maight be wuss."

"That means, that it is as good as can be. And you know as well as I do, John, that you never had such a kind master before. Now, if you take advantage of him, if you sit upon a stump, and go to sleep, if you get too much into his back kitchen, or put too much into your bag on a Saturday night——"

"However did they rob you, Maister? You be that sharp, I should have thought it were not compuss!"

"If you do such things as I have said, John Sage, you will not only lose the best place you ever had, but you will be a disgrace to Christowell, and to me who recommended you. I know, that you are a very honest man; but I also know that very honest men begin to slide under too much opportunity. Now when you come home, on a Sunday-morning, bring your bag, like a man, without any coat over it."

"Passon, you be too bad; and a'most unlike a Christian, after all the holy things you be bound to think of, leastwise on the Sabbath day. I never wud a' drummed to you, a' church this morning, if I cud a' zeen the inside of your mind. I be dree score year and five of age, and no importation on my karakter yet. And who is there, as would come home across the moor, wi'out a bit of zummut, to the front of him?"

"Well, John, you know that I am speaking for your good. You bear a high character, and you deserve it. Whatever is given to you, is your own; if the proper people give it. But bring it as your

own, without concealment. That was the first thing I had to say to you. But I also have another thing, upon my own account. How often are you sent to pass the night, at Weist-Tor?"

"Sometimes once a week, sometimes twice. According to the weather, and the doings of the birds. But I wudn't baide alone there, for a thousand pounds a'most. Joe cometh with me, always."

"Yes, I know. Your son Bill's boy. Colonel Westcombe employs him; and it all helps up. You must have passed a dozen nights there, by this time. Have you ever seen anything particular?"

"Sartin, sir. His Honour had a door put up, to keep the wind out; and us always goes together, to look out; afore bedding down upon the hathe. No, I never draw my money wi'out arning of it. Sometimes 'twould be the moon, and another time the stars, or leastwise the clouds in front of 'un. And once 'twas Jack o' lantern, so sure as I be living!"

"Ah!" said Mr. Short, "that does seem odd. I have heard of him a hundred times, but never seen him. I would ride fifty miles, to see that thing. You shall have a guinea, John, if you can put me up to it. I shall come, and visit you, some night, when it is likely. But what did Jack o' lantern do, that night you saw him? And did you go down, to look after him?"

"The Lord forbid! Why, passon, you know, as well as I do, 'tis sartin death to volly 'un. No, no, us barred the door, and kept each other company. Joe be as brave a'most, as I be."

"How long is it, since you saw that sight, or peeped at it, and run away, you brave generation?"

"Well, sir, maight a' been a fortnight mainly. I don't keep no account of time, too partiklar. The Lord hath ordained for us martels not to do so, with our eyes looking forward to the kingdom. But it wur of a Tuesday; that I be sure of, by reason of the time to kill the fowls."

"Tuesday is the day, that a sheep is always killed. How many Tuesdays, have you been there? Try to recollect; you are famous for your memory."

"Never of a Tuesday, but that once. Nobody can put up they fowls but me, wi'out a clack coming out o' their tongues. They be such a noisy set, to that side o' the moor. And once the good lady, that, keepeth to her chimber, heer'd them a gruntin', when it wur done badly; and his honour come out, and I told him they were vules, and cudn't administer kingdom come, to a young cock with dacency; and so he saith, 'You do it then; John, you do it for the future time.' And I did sixteen on 'em, wi'out a murmur; and

ever since then, I has to do it. But happened one Tuesday, they was to have a holiday; and that wur the night, us seed Jack o' lantern."

"Very well, Sage. Now will you manage to do them early, Tuesday next, unless they are to have another holiday? And then, to be up on the hill, that night; and I will come to you, to see Jack o' lantern. If we see him, you shall have a guinea; and if we don't, you shall have a crown. Don't say a word of it, to any one; unless your master gives you orders not to go. If he does that, just say, that it is my particular wish that you should be there; and then, he will be sure to let you come. But I don't want young Master John to know a word about it. If he did, he would insist on coming too."

"Sartin sure, he wud. He be a push-about young gentleman. No, no, I wun't let 'un hear tell of it. Passon Shart, it shall be done, ezakkerly to your bidding."

Any man, who has not been on Weist-Tor at night, or at any rate towards evening, might underrate the courage of John Sage, and his grandson Joe, in sleeping there. It is perfectly true, that they barred the door, and stopped their ears, if they heard a noise, which it was wiser to ignore than to inquire of; but still every right-minded person knows, that if love laughs at locksmiths, a power (too often supreme in love) ridicules the blacksmith too. Can any bolt, or bar, keep out the Devil?

There is not only this to be considered, but also the general tone of the place, without such visitations. At any time of day, this is very bad indeed, because there is nothing to enrich, or even soften it. Somewhat as a man of rugged nature, or a roguish elephant, hardens into his own bad seams, from lack of female society. But when the night comes down from heaven, or deepens, without any sign of heaven, up the long hollows, and over the grey waste, fantastic things stand forth of shadow, and images of fear perplex the distance.

"Bravo! Here you are! Well done, my friends," Mr. Short exclaimed, for he was glad to see them, as the long day went to rest; "what a large place it is! I began to think, that I should never find you."

"Good eyes be needed, to find the biggest man, as ever trod the earth, or the biggest thing, he hath ever piled upon it, in the loose ways the land hath here about. Little Joe, and me, be like a pair of murmets, hurning about on a big tombstone. Passon, here be pulpits, and the word of God to preach from." John Sage put down

the bone of ham, that he was sucking upon a kistvaen, and gazed largely around.

"I have been here before," answered Mr. Short, who never would be capped with his own hat; "but one forgets this sort of place. Did you bring a bone for me, John?"

"Must needs be a dry one, to agray with such as you, sir. But coom inzaide the little 'ouze, sir. A' be done winderful, winderful golaightly."

"So it is. Very clever, very cumpuss, as you say; and with nicks in the rock, for you to hide in, if the enemy beat down the bar. And here you sleep, on this sweet heather, as plum as any horse-hair. It might blow, and rain, for fifty hours, without a drop, or a breath upon you. You have chosen your place well, with the scoop of the crag to shelter you, and the standing slabs for your side-posts, and your little roof of furze, and ling, the colour of the rocks around. The pixies themselves could scarcely find you, unless you make a fire here. But, where do you keep the pony, John?"

"Well, sir, he never wandereth far, unless the moor-ponies comes a 'ticin of 'un. But he hath a bed of 's own close by, under the big loggin stone. Us can hear him gruntin', as he drameth; and a' maketh rare company, by night. But, passon, 'tis an unkid place, and requaireth a brave man, with the fear of the Lord around him, for to smoothe his eyes to slape."

"You have had your supper, and you want your sleep," replied Mr. Short; for he never encouraged what he called "Psalmodic piety;" and he knew that all men, who live under the sun, must follow him with their inclinations; "take little Joe inside, and bar the door. I shall want no help from you. But show me first, where the Jack o' lantern was."

Old Sage saw, that his courage was not held in very high esteem; but he felt, within himself, that it lacked no vindication. Therefore, he was satisfied with showing, by some general signs, where the dancing light had shone; and then, to keep all blame away, he called his grandson to hear him say—"The Lord have mercy upon thee, passon! Thou bee'st a minister of He. If thy horders draiveth thee, to vollow up the Evil One, us will come, and zee, when thou hast catched un." With these liberal sentiments, he pulled his head in, and barred the door.

Mr. Short had inherited much, from his grandfather, the admiral, of even greater value than the Victory chronometer. Among the best of these things, were sturdy courage, and strong love of justice; both of which seem to be evaporating now, into clouds of mag-

nanimity. The parson sat down, in a square niche of rock, which fitted him better than if built to measure; and from the pockets of his shooting-coat, which was made of stout dark fustian, he drew forth some little things he had prepared, with a hope that they might prove useful. There was no kind of fire-arm among them; nor even what was then called a "life-preserver;" but there was a running noose, of supple round leather, and some strong silk rope from his own window-curtains, and a steel-chain, ending with a short spring-loop. He considered these a little, and arranged them, so that he could pull out any one, or all, when needed; and then, making up his mind for some hours of patience, lit his pipe, and calmly watched the deepening of the darkness.

Not even a sheep, or a dump of a pony, broke the contracting gloom before him, with a spot of movement. Down the hillside, slabs of granite, tilted against one another, or leaning out of the earth, or piled (like tombstones, in pictures of the Resurrection) glanced the faint descent of light, still overlapping the western crest; upon which the cumbrous tor was losing its jagged blackness, in the growth of night. The restless wind, (that ruffles the scanty herbage there by daytime, and bares the edges of desolation,) after a few weak, moaning shivers, sank into the universal calm; and there was not even the twinkle of a star, to mar the dark brown depth of night. "If ever he wanted his lantern, he will want it now," thought Mr. Sharp; "but how deadly cold the air is getting!"

He arose, and flapped his strong round breast, with thickset arms, and solid hands; and then walked to and fro, for half an hour, on a narrow track of safety, at the bottom of the tor. Below this, yawned a great rock circle, of the kind that is called "Druidical," though probably quite as true a work of nature, as a fairy ring is. To rush through this, in the darkness, would be to tempt at least a broken leg; and he had marked his track, to the right or left, before the gloom became so deep. Also he had brought a strong oak staff, to feel his way down the hill, and to assure it; for his chief fear was of bogs. But these are either slightly luminous, or else intensely black, upon a summer night like this. Whatever he did, he must preserve his presence of mind, and walk with care.

At last, when he was almost beginning to weary of the shivering solitude, a faint light twinkled far away; and then disappeared, and then shone clearer, down the valley towards the right. Then, it began to rise and fall, and stop sometimes, and even vanish, as

something intercepted it ; but upon the whole, it was coming nearer, like the light of a vessel beating up towards the bar. Although the weather, and the time of year, were suitable for that phosphoric proceeding, known as "Will o' the Wisp," in the north, and "Jack o' lantern," in the south of England, the parson, without thinking twice, was sure, that he had no pale spectre of that sort, before him. In that particular seam of hill, up which the light was advancing, there was no morass, nor even peaty quagmire ; but a little rill, running down a narow bed of rock-scoop, scarcely so wide as a mangle, and tufts of gorse, interlaid with short sweet grass—shelter, meat, and drink, and music, for the serious-minded sheep. "Ah, he knows what good mutton is ; and perhaps that is why he did not eat mine. Mother Aggett will so over-flour it."

With these reflections, ill-suited perhaps to the gravity of the moment, the vicar of Christowell made some steps, towards a clearer knowledge of the case before him. He knew, that he was going to a perilous encounter, with a man as superior to himself in size, as inferior alas, in principle. But he relied upon the justice of his cause—as everybody does, who ever goes to war ; and although his grandfather's clock was gone, he had serious hopes of getting back some rusty remnant of his other household gods. But, just as he was setting forth, a squeaky little voice came after him, and a little figure followed it. "Oh, do 'e let me coom, passon ; do 'e let me coom, 'long of 'e."

"I am surprised to see you here, when all good boys are fast asleep. Go back, Joe Sage, to your grandfather." Mr. Short spoke crossly ; for he warmly "undesired"—as the western improvers of our language put it—to have his little expedition talked of, all over Christowell, to-morrow. "Go you to bed," he said ; "and tuck your little toes up."

"Grandfather be aveared of pixies, sir," said the boy, still holding on to him ; "but I been to schule, outside of your parish ; and I ain't got no faith, in none on 'em."

"Then, go back, you unhappy little sceptic," Mr. Short answered, without applause ; for he knew what comes of that warty state of mind, which crop-up lads get into. "The birch is the right thing, for you to believe in."

Little Joe Sage was discouraged by this view of his intellectual advancement ; and he went back slowly, till his footsteps dropped into the silence of the hill. But then he turned, and listened, and pursued the vicar, at safe distance, and with frequent palpitations of his small, but not ignoble heart.

Feeling his way down the steep, with his stick, and watching the movements of that light, the wary parson kept on steadily, until he came to a furzy bottom, where a small brook tinkled through. Here were many little windings, such as water brings to pass, and juts of sudden turn, and even a breadth or two of flat land among the furze. It was much too dark to make out all that; but according to the general manner of the moor, there would be short sweet pasture here, and gentle slopes to lie down upon, and herbs that improve both the flavour, and texture, of a conscientious mutton.

The Dartmoor sheep is a thoughtful fellow, who knows what a greedy world it is, and therefore sleeps with one eye open. As Mr. Short came down this hollow, two or three woolly forms rushed by him, elder members of the flock, who had taken the alarm, and made off betimes. But, whether from selfishness, or no worse than sleepy lapse of duty, they failed to raise the warning "baa," that should have stirred up their relatives.

"That fellow can't be far off now; and of course he will conceal his light; my best plan will be to get behind this ridge, and watch what he is up to." With these reflections, Mr. Short slipped quietly into some broken ground, commanding a little strip of pasture, girt with bushes, and granite slabs. Here were at least a score of sheep; and the air was thick with their oily smell. By the aid of a feeble glance of light, partly from a lifting cloud, and partly from the water, and some white gravel on the brink of it, the watcher could make out their position, and could guess at their different attitudes. Some were already afoot, and listening, with short ears pricked, and long bald noses pointed up, to catch the air; some were half-rising, with their weight thrown forward, and hind feet scratching on the ground, for leverage; while others, of the fatter order, still lay grunting, well aware that something was being talked about, but convinced that it was nothing, but a pack of stuff.

Among these last, was a very worthy wether, an excellent animal in truly prime condition, with a speciality of mind, which had enabled him to fatten in the right style, and must add superior relish to his body. Confident in his own integrity, and fitness to survive all other sheep,—though a butcher might have taken it for fitness to be killed,—this sheep declined all participation in the low misgivings of the leaner lot. For fat, when laid on in the proper places, enlarges, enriches, and ennobles the mind; as every one acknowledges, who has grown fat. But this sheep had little time for more self-gratulation. For suddenly, a long dark form was upon him. He found himself grasped, by the back of the neck, and raising his

head to remonstrate, lost all further knowledge of existence. There was nothing of him left, but wool, and mutton; and a long carving-knife was stuck into the grass, among the last marks of his pretty nibbling teeth. "Rare bit of stuff that parson's knife is! The only prize he ever got at Oxford, I'll be bound. And no doubt he stole that from the buttery."

Mr. Short, as he heard that most untrue description of his university career (which had been good), found it very difficult to hold his peace. But keenly apprehensive of the *suo sibi cultro*, he kept his head down, and laboured not to grind his teeth. For he knew, that if he did prevail against this Ajax, it must be by the tactics of Ulysses. There stood the slayer,—as the grand speech has it,—but there was not a symptom of remorse as yet, and to-morrow's sun might announce, to Mrs. Aggett, the decease of the wrong man, the one who paid regularly eightpence halfpenny a pound for all his mutton. "I will stick here, instead of being stuck;" thought Mr. Short, with that brevity which made his sermons so delightful.

The skilful slayer took his time as well. He had once been famed for hospitality; and the desertion of his friends, which ensued upon his trouble, though it might have blunted, had not wholly soured a nature capable of good. And in fact, he was making preparations now for a dinner-party, upon a good scale, to a highly select list of rogues at the *Raven*. One, or two of these had expressed some doubt, concerning the quality of Dartmoor mutton; because they had only had it, as supplied by contract, at the charges of the British prison-ratepayer. And undoubted as their right was to good things in gaol (when restricted of their right to steal them), not one of them had sat down to a fine juicy leg, till they came to believe, that there was no such thing. This was enough to make any man labour, when he had nothing else to do, to establish his opinion, by some very careful work. Without this in view, Mr. Wenlow perhaps would scarcely have come upon this hunting-ground again, and at night; when a sheep might be shot any day, or at any time of night, with comfort. But it was his duty to show high art now; and whatever faults there might be in his constitution, it was good of him, thus to desire to impart the results of his long experience in mutton. However, this virtuous weakness led, as it too often does, to calamity.

It was a time of year when meat must not be thumped about, or used as a weight to be "putted," or a hammer to make holes in its own flesh and blood, as railway porters treat it now. Mr. Wenlow understanding this, proceeded with hospitable care, to sling that

good animal upon his back; so that the prime parts might ride well. With the aid of his lantern, which had been left in brief eclipse, he nicely corded the cold hind-feet together, then carefully wiped his knife, and thrust it into a sheath at his left side. Then, after blowing out his candle, and concealing it; with a trifle of a groan, he shouldered this fine weight of mutton, and found that he could manage it. Not that he meant to go all the way home with it—for strong as he was, that would have tried him—but only to get a cool dry place, where his prize might be stored, for future operations. "I ought to have him now," thought Mr. Short; "I will let him get tired; and then tackle him."

The sheepslayer, under his burden, walked with a long heavy stride, which prevented him from hearing any light sound of pursuit. So that, although the night was very dark and still, the parson could keep him pretty well in view, with the help of the white body hanging on his back. And it was not likely that a man, with such a load, would depart from the downward track, if he could help it. For the ground was uneven, though not bouldery, nor morassy; and a strong man had as much as he could do, to get along, with a weight, like a bag of potatoes, to stoop to, and small opportunity of picking every step. And sure enough, before very long, this began to come hard upon the wind of Mr. Wenlow. Mr. Short heard him begin to pant a little; and then he could see, that the sheep, upon his back, was swagging about, as if its death had been a dream, and it were trying to get up, to graze again.

"Now I will have him, as he had Mother Aggett, and cord him fast to his own dinner."

Meditating thus, and with presence of mind in every quick joint of his body, the vicar of Christowell, bound, as a parson is, to be a good hand at knotty subjects, came swiftly behind the sheep-felon, and flung a running noose of well-soaped round leather (formerly the rein of *Trumpeter*) over his head and down his arms, and then tightened, and turned it, on the backbone of the sheep. "Halloa!" cried Mr. Wenlow; and "Halloa!" replied Mr. Short; but paused for no further conversation. In a second, he had hitched his running rein, and passed the silk rope of his curtains round the knees of the man, who had invaded his domestic life, and knotted it strictly, in that crampy portion of the human system. Down went Wenlow, with his foul deed on his back, and fouler words issuing vainly from his mouth; which was stopped, by the soft obstruction of a clump of moss, of the *Sphagnum* order.

"To swear is as futile, as it is wrong;" the parson remarked,

while he tightened up his knots, and proceeded to add to the embarrassment of his prisoner, by buckling some straps around him. "My friend, you are captured; and your wisest course is, to reconcile yourself to the situation. I don't want to hurt you, more than I can help. There, now you may be quite comfortable."

"I am chok—chok—choking;" the other gasped from out the moss; "if you don't want to kill me on the spot, take that d—d sheep off my neck."

"By no means, my friend. You put him there yourself; and it is not fair to blame him. However, hold up your nose a moment; and I will give you more room to breathe." With these words, the parson drew forth his own knife, from the sheath at the side of the robber; and smiling at the oddness of the situation, mowed the moss around his prisoner's face; who moved his nose nervously about, from this novel mode of shaving. "My hand is very steady; keep quite still. There now, you will do nicely," continued the vicar; "and can safely express any gratitude you feel."

"I don't feel much;" replied Mr. Wenlow.

"From long experience, I never expect much;" the other answered pleasantly. "But how long, can you stay here, without inconvenience?"

"Either murder me at once; or take that weight off me."

The prisoner uttered this, with such a painful groan, that Mr. Short was really afraid to leave him so, while he went for the needful help to deliver him to justice. Humanely, but unwisely, he relieved him of that burden, while taking good care not to release his arms, or legs. Then, feeling that his fastenings were all secure, and knotted out of reach of any twisting power, the parson sat down to recover his breath (for he had been working nimbly), as well as to consider, how to carry on his work. It had been a very hard job to catch this fellow; and now it seemed a harder one, to dispose of him, when caught. Here he was, at midnight, many miles away from any inhabited house that he knew of; and though the tall man could have carried him with ease, it was out of his power, to carry the tall man. If he could have set him up, to begin with, his head would have hung upon his hat-crown, like a gurgoyle; while his heels dragged on the ground, like the hoppers of a seed-drill. Meditating thus, Mr. Short with joy heard a squeaky little voice, and beheld Joe Sage. "You are a brave boy," he said; "and here is a brave job for you." Then giving him careful directions, and promise of a crown-piece, if he deserved it, the vicar set off for a long trudge across the moor

CHAPTER XXIX.

FAST BIND, FAST FIND.

MR. ARTHUR, and his guest Mr. Tucker sat up, that night, far beyond the usual hour of bed-time, at Lark's Cot. When a man begins to tell the story of his life, however concise he may attempt to be, he is pretty sure to wander into many side issues, and get entangled among incidents that require explanation. The timber-merchant, though accustomed to an early pillow, listened, with scarcely a yawn, to the long, and rather strange, narrative of his host, and made him repeat some parts, to be sure of them; so much at variance did they seem, with the ordinary course of human nature.

"Whether you be right, sir, or whether you be wrong, is not for me to judge," he replied at last; "all dependeth on the one, that should be uppermost, when two big principles run counter to each other. But whether you be right, sir, or whether you be wrong, there is not a man in fifty thousand, would have done as you have done."

"I have not been free from doubts myself," his host acknowledged, with a weary sigh; "and that has made it so much harder for me. But now, knowing everything, will you tell me, what you believe to be my first duty?"

"Give me the night, sir, to think it all over; though I don't see, how there can be much doubt about it. But I never heard tell of such affairs before; and things might come across me, like enough, in the night season; and the head is always clearer, in the morning." The thing, that was coming across the old man, was sleep, heavy sleep; for he had walked far that day, and the change to the Dartmoor air was lulling.

"It is too bad of me, to keep you up so late," Mr. Arthur said, as he looked at his watch. "Good night, my friend; and no dreams of battle. What a poor life it is to dream of!"

After shaking that honest old hand right heartily, the captain sat down, to compose his mind, which was stirred with the many-pronged fork of memory. It was not to please himself, that he had told his tale; but partly that he might not appear mysterious, or churlish, to a trusty friend, and partly because he did really desire advice, in the present see-saw of his fortunes. A strong man scarcely ever takes advice—except in professional questions, or the

like—still he may be glad sometimes, to have it, and consider it; even as he would contemplate a pill.

While Mr. Arthur was meditating thus, in the flatness that follows excitement, he heard something soft strike the window behind him, which he had just closed for the night. At first, he took it for the flip of a bat, or perhaps of a Sphinx-moth, attracted by his light; but when it came again, he went, and opened out the lattice; and there he saw a rosebud, upon the sill outside.

"Come down softly," said a voice which he knew well, though forgetting for a moment, whose it was; "I want to speak to you, without disturbing any one."

Mr. Short made certain that he must be known; but his friend, with a mind intent upon his own affairs, took a big stick before he opened his door; for the outer world was very dark, to eyes contracted by candle-light. "Don't knock me down," Mr. Short said briskly; "I am not a thief—no such luck—only a thief-catcher."

"Set a thief, to catch a thief," replied the good man of the house; "but what have you done with him, and what is it about? Come in, and tell me all about it. You are tired; you want something."

"I never wanted something more, in all my life. Starvation is staring me in the face; and dark as it is, I don't like her looks. I feel as if I could crunch a bone, after *Nous* had polished it."

"You shall have as nice a bit of cold salt round, as ever came from Moreton. I was lucky to have it in the house, for we have had an unexpected guest to-day. But he is gone to bed. Is your thief fastened up?"

"I defy him to get away," replied the hungry vicar; "and even if he does, it is better than to sacrifice a life, so valuable as mine. I spent all my dinner-time, in making springles; and my poor inside has springled me."

"We will soon cure that," said Mr. Arthur; "come into the kitchen. It is the best harbour in a storm of that sort. There now, you can talk, while I fetch the victuals."

"Erroneous man, you put the cart before the horse. I will talk, by-and-by. For the present, let me feed. Sweet are the uses of adversity. The next fellow I see, with an empty stomach, shall walk into my larder. Ha, what a draught of ale! Now for the loaf! You might cut that meat, a trifle thicker. Shaving is a waste of time. I can't stop to say, 'thank you.' You will perceive my gratitude, in my proceedings. Three more slices; never mind about the mustard. I never tasted anything so delicious in my life! What a piece of luck, that I saw your candle!"

"And a piece of luck for me," said the hospitable captain; "I was going to bed, perhaps, a little in the dumps. I will take a glass of ale myself; and then I am at your service, if there is anything to do."

"There is a lot to do; but I cannot bear to take you from your home, at this time of night. It is simply this—that I have caught, and strapped, and left in the depths of the moor, that fellow who robbed my house, and corded Mrs. Aggett, and stole my grandfather's famous watch. But I don't know how to bring him down. Like all good-for-nothings, he weighs heavy."

There may have been some jealousy in this remark; but the captain was thinking of more urgent matters. "How many miles do you think it is? And how long is it safe to leave him? You make a point of having him, I suppose?"

"I should think I did. About six miles, I should say. But the moor scatters all one's ideas of distance."

"Very well. Then rest yourself, for half an hour. It will be no loss of time; because the moon will be rising, and then we shall be able to go twice as fast. Meanwhile I will get ready my *feretrum*."

"My very kind friend," said Mr. Short, as he gladly took the offered pipe, and put up his legs to rest a little, "you often use Latin words, rather aptly. Among your other innumerable gifts, that one especially surprises me. For a man, who has knocked about much in the world, forgets straightway every syllable of Latin; except the examples in his grammar."

"But suppose, that I was brought up for the Church? Is not the first of all needs for holy orders, a lively acquaintance with dead languages?"

"My object is to smoke my pipe in peace. Go you, and get your stretcher ready."

"Upon my word, I believe he was intended for a parson," thought the weary vicar, as he worked his pipe; "and a very good parson has been lost to the world, by some sad mishap; not impossibly a pluck. But they never used to pluck men, in the good old times, half as pluckily as they do now. And the man has brains enough for anything; but for his extraordinary crotchet of manuring the ground with them. However, he is a noble-hearted fellow. Here's to his health, and the increase of such!"

"Now, you can see what a simple thing this is," said his host, returning from the darkness of the door. "I ought to have a patent for it; but—but I don't care. It has cost me a good deal of thought, I can assure you; though you may see nothing worth thinking

about. It has these four legs, so that you can rest it. And you fold it up like this; and the legs fold too; and it rides upon your back, as easy as an artist's easel. We have often had 3 cwt. of pot-vines upon it. And here, in case of heavy weight, we can have cross braces. You take them, and I will carry it; in about two minutes, we will set forth. But I must leave a note for my dear Rosie. She will be about, long before we can return; or at any rate, she may be, if anything delays us."

Soon the two sturdy men set forth, with the waning moon lifting an ivory shoulder, like that of Pelops, from the eastern bank of haze. They talked but little; for the way was rough, and the captain's thoughts reverting to his own affairs; of which he said nothing to the parson, having done ample violence already to his habits, by that long narrative to Mr. Tucker. Their course was a winding one, by reason of the ground, and of dark water-beds with bogs among them, so that the pale streak of dawn began to show, below the mounted moon, by the time they reached the Tor. "Shall we knock up old Wisdom in his bed?" asked Mr. Short.

"You know best;" his companion replied. "But I think, it would only be waste of time. We can fetch him out, when we come back; if we want a little change of bearers. You seem very certain, that your man cannot be gone. But I am never sure of anything."

"If he is gone, henceforth I will believe in witchcraft," the vicar answered merrily; "even as my congregation do. Samson himself could not escape such withes."

"Nevertheless, we had better lose no time. 'Fast bind, fast find,' is an excellent proverb, with a play upon words; such as most of them have. It was a pity, that you left that boy so near him."

However, Mr. Short was as cock-sure as ever, and full of fine faith in his knowledge of knots. So they strode on vigorously, down the pastured bottom.

"I could almost have vowed that this must be the spot," the parson exclaimed at last, with serious misgivings; "but places are so terribly misleading, in the dark. It must have been round the next corner, at the latest."

They turned the next corner, and there was no other, but a long straight reach of open valley; neither was there any living form in sight. With a grim look, and a little grinding of his teeth, Mr. Short led his friend back, to the bend they had just quitted. "We must have passed him, among these bushes. It is simply impos-

sible, that he should have moved. I defy him to have stirred ten yards;" he said.

The captain smiled provokingly, for he had some experience of the way, in which captives do break loose. "Show me where he was; I will put down my hand-barrow. We can find it in a moment, if we find him."

"Of course we shall find him," replied the other; "no sane person can have a doubt about it. He may have rolled a little, as a shot rabbit does; but there is no hole, for him to creep into. Either he has rolled into a clump of furze, or into the bed of the brook. That's it. He has managed to get down to the brook, to drink. How stupid of me to have overlooked that!"

With certainty renewed, he went back to find him, and searched every tuft of rush, and wet growth; but there was no sheep-stealer there.

"This is the spot where the combat was; and here is the mark where the poor sheep bled," Mr. Arthur called down to him, as the light grew clearer; "but neither sheep, nor man, remains. Is it your opinion, that the sheep rolled too?"

Mr. Short laughed, and said, "You are too right. We are done; that is clear. I never thought about the sheep. If the mutton is gone, so the man must be. What a fool I was, to ease him of his burden so! And he has had the impudence to walk off with it. What an atrocious scoundrel!"

"Well, I rather admire him, for sticking to his purpose. A common rogue would have made off, light-footed. Gone he is, in spite of all your lashings. There can be little doubt, that the boy released him."

"Little Joe Sage! He would never dare to do it. But what is this, stuck upon the furze-bush here? 'Best respects to Rev. Mr. Short, and will return his visit, some fine night.' Upon my word, it becomes too bad! I seem to be made, only to be laughed at."

"Recover your spirits, my dear friend," said the captain, with a lofty endeavour not to smile; "there are times, when all of us have that feeling. But every right-minded person will look grave, at hearing of your trials, and how well you bear them."

"Well, you don't look over-grave, to begin with," complained the poor parson; and then he burst out laughing, wherein Mr. Arthur joined, with freedom of true sympathy.

"It is all very fine for you to laugh," resumed the parson, as if he had not been the aggressor in that vein; "but it is high time to look things in the face. Sheep are a property, unusually sacred in

the eye of the law, because so usually stolen. An act of this kind is not to be passed over. When my goods were stolen it was *penes me*, to put up with it in silence, or to make a stir. But when I see another man's sheep made off with, I have no right to sit down, and contemplate the process. I am bound to regard him, with the utmost rigour of the law."

"You have done that already, and a great deal more than that. You have made him fast to his own *corpus delicti*. But you loosed him; and he took his own *habeas corpus*."

"It is too true; there is nothing more stinging, than amiability abused. However, it is not that, that moves me; but the strict compulsion of a simple duty. I shall have to lay the whole of this matter before the nearest magistrate, Colonel Westcombe; not the nearest to Christowell, but the nearest to the place, where this happened. And I believe he has a kind of shooting-lease, of this very part, where we now stand. So that it would be rude almost, to apply to any other Justice first."

"Certainly it would be. You are quite right." The captain detected, or perhaps imagined, some particle of malice in the parson's words. "If it becomes a matter of business, I am ready to appear, before Colonel Westcombe, or anybody else, who may be the proper man. But we must not blame the boy; until we know a little more about it."

"Boys are a bad lot," said Mr. Short decisively; "they prefer what is nasty to nice things to talk of; and they would rather do mischief, than be useful. But I will get it out of him. Let us be off. Old Sage used to be a good sort of fellow, enormously conceited; what I call a fool of wisdom. He knew a great deal better than Farmer William, the senior churchwarden, when I spoke well; and everybody looked to him, to nod his head, before they durst rattle a stick in church. But since he has been at Okehampton so much, he has heard some fellows, who preach without a book; and it seems to have lowered his character. Let us go, and rout him up, at once. You had better leave your pot-barrow, to be sent for."

"Not I;" replied the captain, with a good-tempered smile, for he saw that his valued friend was cross. "I am not going to have my invention stolen. The beauty of it is its portability. Best foot forward; and I am your man."

When they came to the hut, with the beauty of the morning resting on the crags above, they found old John, looking wiser than a thousand Sphinxes, in the fore-front of the hill. "Ah, you gentlemen, gentlemen," he said, "you do looke crule tired surely! I cud

a' told 'e, 'twur no good, to go hunting Jack o' lantern. Howsever, I never expects narrabody to harken to me, nowadays."

"Fetch out your little rogue of a grandson;" the vicar demanded sternly.

"Passon, have a care what you be saying," Mr. Sage answered, as he shortened up his braces; "ne'er a one of our vam'ly hath had that name applied to him, without haction, good at law. The poor buy hath been fast aslape all night, in the cornder, behind of me. Did you plaze to think, he were your Jack o' lantern?"

"This beats everything!" exclaimed the parson; while the captain laughed, till he was almost fit to cry; and old John, with amazement, regarded them both.

"'Twor natteral," he said, "to come of so much night-work. You good gentlefolks be pixie-ridden. What a many cases of it I have zeed! My own grandveyther had it dree times, because he were a bit weak-minded. But it comes off easy, when you know the cure. Go you to the biggest stone in sight, and make the cross upon it, and then eat fried bakkon. Her shall be ready, gentlemen, by the time you be; if so be, I can only get little Joe awake, to rout the vire up." Having washed at the spring, he went indoors apace for he wanted his breakfast also.

CHAPTER XXX.

QUO WARRANTO?

"THERE is nothing to be done," said Colonel Westcombe, when Mr. Short had told him the whole of his adventures; "it was your duty, as eye-witness of a felony, to lay an information about it. But after that, you see, we get no further. None of us can say, what this man's name is. We have heard something vague, about a warrant being issued, and a good reward offered for his apprehension. But who can apprehend him, when even you have failed? And, if he were taken, he would soon get off. There is not a lock-up that would hold him, in the county; and we could not send him off to London, if that is where he ought to be, without at least three examinations, and remands—supposing that he would stay in custody so long; which could hardly be expected of him. But you may feel this, as you go home—which you shall not do till you have dined with us—that you have done your utmost, and been wonder-

fully near the fulfilment of a public duty. Although, as I have said, he would have got off afterwards, by the aid of attorneys, or the ironmongers. I have had some experience of the Bench already; our intentions are good, but we do not see our way to them. Whenever he is caught, (as he must be, in the end,) I hope that it may be beyond us altogether. I would not discourage you, from laying hands on him; but, if you can do it, outside our division, it would be a much better thing for everybody."

"And that is your settled conclusion, is it? That, because a man is hard to catch, we must not attempt to catch him! If your practice with the Frenchmen had been such, what a thorough thrashing you would have got!"

"Of course we should," the colonel answered; "and thoroughly deserved it too. But there never will be such a set of men again. There are no such fellows, in the commission of the peace."

"If you consider it the right thing, to be beaten by a rogue, because you have none but fools to help you; there is nothing more for me to say, Colonel Westcombe."

"Now don't be so peppery, my dear friend," said the colonel, offering an easy chair; "if there is anything you can suggest, sit down, and talk over it quietly. Everybody knows your abilities, Short. You must not imagine that because they have made me a 'beak,' as it is called, I set myself up, to lay down the law, to a clever man like you. I know nothing whatever of the law, any more than the rest of the J.P.'s do. We try to act, according to the light of common sense. And what more can you expect of us?"

"Certainly, nothing beyond common sense. We are glad that you should have it—possibly, as a new gift of office. But is it common sense, that a neighbourhood, however wild, and thinly peopled it may be, should be harassed for months, by a desperate fellow, simply because he is desperate? And that you, with your stern sense of discipline, my friend, should put up with it, and make excuses for it!"

"Well, I don't like it. And I may be doing more than you know of, to try to put a stop to it. Whose sheep was it, that was killed, and stolen? He should come, and sign a deposition."

"The sheep affair is nothing, in comparison with the rest. Are we all to be sheep, and have our throats cut, at the first convenience of that villain? How much longer, till you do something?"

"That depends mainly upon circumstances," replied the colonel blandly; "drum-head law will not do here. There is some informality about the warrant; if what I was told, the other day, is true. The

coroner issued his warrant first, somewhere in Surrey, or in Bucks, perhaps it was. And after that, the magistrates issued theirs; and both of them were wrong, they seem to say. However, that is not in any way my business; and I have heard a dozen stories, as to what his name is. If I could have my own way, my plan would be to treat him as a brigand, hunt him down, and then hand him over to the civil authorities, with a double twist of tent-rope, round his moving members. But such things are not to be done, in this age."

"I fear that we are tumbling all to pieces now;" said Mr. Short, trying to be brisk about it; "I am not at all a stickler for the fine old times; but I do like a little bit of decency. When a man shows any sign of real wit, I can make over-much allowance for him; for the chuckle in his brain upsets his sense. But look at this thing, written here in pencil; there is no wit in it, only vulgar insolence."

"You could scarcely expect," replied the colonel, examining the paper found upon the furze-bush; "that a man's jocosity should be at its best, when he has been strapped up for some hours. But I call this very fair; not strikingly facetious perhaps, but civil, and well-worded. And it shows good will, to a limited extent. Come, come, we must not be too hard upon him. I never did believe that story, about his murdering two women. Look! The man spells every word correctly, at any rate so far as I can judge; and I have had some experience in that, though I left school very early. Do you mean to tell me, Short, that any man would murder two women, who could spell like that, on the spur of the moment, and by a lantern?"

"A' maight, and yet again a' maightn't; as our Farmer William says;" Mr. Short was not going to add to his troubles an argument, on so abstruse a point. "I suppose he has let your grouse alone?"

Colonel Westcombe was too good to suppose, that his friend could mean, by that last remark, any paltry insinuation. "I don't know whether he has, or not," was all he said about it.

"Well now," continued the vicar, who ought to have been more ashamed than he actually was; "I want to know, what you make out of those letters, or half-letters, here at the top of the paper. You see that this paper has been torn off, probably after being doubled down, from a sheet of something—perhaps a letter. The crease, which has guided the severance, was meant, most likely, to have come beneath the last line of the letter; but instead of that, it happens to have taken the last line, pretty nearly along its belt;

as one might say. We have the lower half of the words still here ; in some places more, and in some parts less ; for the writing is not, to a nicety, straight, though more so than happens, in nine cases out of ten. Can you make out, what these words have been?"

"Not I," replied the colonel ; "'tis as much as I can do, to make out words, when I get them in the lump. I could not read even print, bisected. And, if this is a private communication, what right have we to exert our brains upon it?"

"Every possible right, against such a villain ; to protect society from him. I have spared no labour to decipher that bisected line ; and I am pretty sure that I have done so ; although there are some words still uncertain. With the upper half, it would have been much easier work ; still I think that I have made the words out—'to remove her, at one day's notice. But beware of harming her.' And the signature, in the same line with it, was either Y. Y. or G. G. —What mischief is this fellow up to next?"

"Whatever it is, I shall be much obliged to him, if he will do it on your side of the moor. Over in Bovey Tracy, and Moreton, and Newton, there are magistrates of long magisterial descent, who understand wicked ways, and the way to deal with them. But here, there is nobody to give me the lead, or even to back me up, if I should take it. And everybody wants me to put down everybody else, because I have been accustomed to fight the French. It is quite another pair of shoes, I can tell you."

"Of course it is, and they do not fit you ; however, you will trudge on, till they do. You have the right stuff for it ; good will, common sense, activity, and the love of justice. You will be the best Justice in the county, after two or three years of experience, and the most popular and the most respected one ; because of your upright, and generous nature."

"You ought to be more consistent, Short ; you were running me down, not two minutes ago."

"And so I will, when it is necessary ; for I give every man his due, be it praise or blame. But without going into that, what does this line mean? I make something serious of it."

"If you can make head, or tail of it, although it is all tail already, you ought to be chief-constable of the county."

"A man who can't catch his own thief! However, by the light of imagination, I do make some tail of it. My interpretation is, that these rogues mean to carry off Rose Arthur."

Colonel Westcombe looked at Mr. Short, with intense, yet rational amazement. "I have known you make wonderful hits," he said ;

"and the cleverest woman in Okehampton says, that you have beaten her thoroughly. Still, you must have something more to show, than this broken line, before you speak like that."

"Certainly, I have other things to go by; and I will tell you what they are. I have not spoken about them sooner; because my friend Arthur had his reasons—which are quite unknown to me—for holding aloof from your good worship. But since you have found him out, and met him, my restriction vanishes. I mean, that I am at liberty to mention him to you; which I could not properly do before. Very well; I know, though I have not told him of it, that this infamous fellow, whoever he may be—has been prowling, more than once, about his place; although there are no sheep there to steal, neither is his house worth robbing. Also I know, from two or three things, which I have picked up, in hunting out my own grievance, that he has done this, at the instigation of another fellow, perhaps even worse than himself. Therefore, I begin to smell a rat."

"I never could see into a complication," the colonel replied, with his honest face quite red, for he had taken a great liking to Miss Arthur; "I always look at men, as if they were like me."

"That is the worst of being honest. You are almost sure to make that mistake. And poor Arthur makes it also, and will probably have to pay for it. He believes entirely in a stupid fellow, who means no harm, I dare say; but means his own good, first of all. This fellow relies on his thickness; like a crocodile letting down his eyelids. But he sees a deal more, than he pretends to see; and Betty Sage tells me, that he has been and bought a red-cushioned chair, to go to sleep in. It follows, that he must have had a tip; and where would he get it without treachery? He never comes to church, and he doesn't send his children. They are becoming a nest of savages, at Brent-fuzz corner, where he lives. I have told Arthur, that it is his duty, to make his workmen come to church; but he told me, that he never meddled with such matters."

"I think that he was quite right," replied the colonel; "he might try to persuade them; as I do with mine. Anything more is beyond his business. They resent it; and in their place, we should do the same."

"That is true enough; and I have not pressed it. Still, the fellow used to come to church; and he sleeps enough for two, in the week-days. Our schoolmaster used to have to knock him on the head, on account of the snoring noise he made; and that was sometimes undesirable. But it roused up the others; and in

his absence, old Jacobs, who must be doing something with his rod, has given offence, by administering a rap to men, who are considerable ratepayers. And that makes us miss Sam Slowbury."

"I can understand that. But reflect a moment, Short. May not the want of this outlet for the stick have created some prejudice, in your mind, against the man?"

"Not in the least. It has only induced me to consider his evil ways. And I do not dwell upon these large points only. But the other day, I came upon him, round a corner, in the thick of my friend's plantation. And instead of being fast asleep, he was standing up, staring as if he had just seen a ghost. 'What's the matter, Sam?' I said; and *Nous*, who was with me, pelted away, in full hunt of some enemy. Sam could not answer; but his eyes were jumping, like peppercorns, in a mill, going to be ground. He wanted to look at me; and he wanted to look after the vanished one; and also after *Nous;* and most of all, he wanted to be looking nowhere. So I spoke again; and I said, 'Sam, the Devil hath got hold of thee.' When he heard those words, he laid hold of a tree; and you might have heard his heart go thumping. 'Make a clean breast of it, Sam,' I exhorted him, in my deepest pulpit-voice; and he gurgled in his throat, and was trying to fetch words; when back comes that confounded *Nous*. You know, what the training of that dog is. When he has anything particular to say, or any excuse to urge for his failures, he sits up, and begs, like a little lap-dog. Well, he came, and sat up in that ludicrous style, between Sam Slowbury and me; and the whole of Sam's conscience was gone, in a second. I never felt more put out with *Nous*. I know it was unjust—you need not tell me. But there was a sort of crisis; and he had undone it. I shall never get such an opportunity again. Before I could recover my condition to go on with it, Slowbury was grinning, with a fine red face, and all his little budget of wits come back."

"And a little budget will beat a big one, Short," said the colonel, who enjoyed his friend's upset; "I have seen that, a hundred times; and I have done it myself, sometimes, with the clever people. Not that I could ever do it, with you though, my friend. Keep out of the range of the rifle-men."

"It is a trifle altogether," continued the vicar, "that I should be laughed at, through the sheer force of circumstances—which have been most sadly against me of late—by a disloyal member of my parish, who was just reduced properly to his marrow-bones. I care not two skips of a flea for that; because I must collar him, by-and-by. I trust in the justice of my cause, and the coal and blanket

club ; to which he must pay up seven shillings and sixpence, or lose fifteen. I shall have him full of piety, by All Saints' Day ; but the pest is to have lost the clean breast he was making. I could not help giving *Nous* a smack, for his absurdity."

"Then you ought to have had it yourself," said his friend ; "but what do you suppose you would have heard from Sam ? You have such a gift of putting things together, that you must know, (almost as well as if you had heard it) what had happened to him."

"He had given audience to some rogue ; perhaps this very villain who has robbed me of my watch, and who wants to have his turn with Arthur. Why should *Nous* have set off, like that, unless he smelled a well-known enemy ? A common tramp, or a workman on the lounge, would never have stirred him up like that. He recognized some one who had wronged him, by his scent, and probably pursued him, till he crossed the stream."

"You will lose your favourite," replied Colonel Westcombe ; "unless he controls his feelings better. That man will kill him, if they meet again. But why have you not given Mr. Arthur warning, of this dangerous fellow prowling round his place ? That seems to me the first thing, you should have done."

"With an ordinary man, it would have been so. And even in his case, I have doubted. But he lives a peculiar life, and detests any interference, or suggestion. Also I have felt that, without more proof, I might do a great wrong to Slowbury, who has a large family, depending on his wages. Therefore I resolved to wait a little, and endeavour myself to intercept the danger. And now, I shall be glad of your advice."

"I believe, that you have acted aright so far. Wisely, I mean, as well as justly. But what to do next—I must have time to think." Here the colonel began to move his thick grey eyebrows, as he always did, to aid grave mental process. "In the first place, it cannot be the desire of the law, that such a fellow should go on defying it, for ever. Sarcastic as you are, you can hardly maintain, that such would be the desire of the law."

"One would scarcely think so ; unless one judged the law, by its actions. And that would not be fair ; because it does not judge us so."

"Very well ; let us take that for granted. Assuming, then, as we may safely do, that the law would like to catch that man, how are we to carry out its wishes ? I am told, that it would take at least a company of soldiers, not such fellows as they have now, but really disciplined, and seasoned men, to surround his haunts, and work

him out. He shifts his quarters, according to the weather, and the time of year, and the condition of his health, which must upon the whole be strong; or surely he would be laid up with ague. How he escapes it, I cannot understand."

"He must be doubled up with rheumatism, if it were not for the frequent change of air, and the constant use of this specific." Here Mr. Short showed Colonel Westcombe the cover of a pill-box, which he had found near the place of his conflict with the felon; and his friend knew immediately what it was, and shook his head sadly, that the rogue should be so clever.

"He may live in the bogs for weeks together, if he has plenty of those," said the colonel; "I wish I could get my young grouse to take them; for I fear they find the climate damp. But now, about this villain—if indeed he is a villain; for I hear that he entertains a high regard for me, though he has not extended it to you, my friend—it appears to me, that we must not be rash, but first get a new warrant from head-quarters; which would prove that we are in earnest; and then put our heads together, how to execute it. I don't know this matter right out, at present. As Jack used to say, when he was at Oxford, 'I haven't got it up;' though he never broke down, because he is blest with such ability. But from what I hear, he was first to be arrested, upon the warrant of the coroner; and when that came to nothing, some jealousy arose; and I don't know exactly, how it was. However, there seems to be a warrant now flourishing; only I am told that the name is wrong. However, I shall see a man on Tuesday fortnight, who will be able to tell us more about it. And then, we shall be able to take some steps."

"But how many steps will he have taken? My dear friend, you used not to be like this. Did you wait, till Tuesday fortnight, when the enemy was in front of you?"

"Not we. But that was quite a different thing. We understood what we were at. But now, I must tell you candidly, that I don't know." Then the colonel laughed; and the parson did the same.

"It is all very fine to laugh," resumed the latter; "but the thing is no joke, after all. It seems to be a lucky thing, that he got away; or you might have committed me, for an assault. I shall take good care, not to risk my life again; if this is the proper course of justice. But who is our great authority, who will set things straight, in three weeks' time?"

"My old friend, General Punk, has promised to be with us, for

the shooting then. Of course, you will join us, and bring *News*. Now you need not smile; for the general has promised to go to the authorities, and put things straight. It is useless to beat about the bush like this. I feel the reproach of it, as much as you do. And the very first instant, when I see my way ——"

"The truth of it is," said Mr. Short, "that the brigands, and the soldiers, were hand in glove in Spain; and you love, and admire, the whole tribe of them."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SILVER KEY.

WHILE these things thus were going on, or to put it more correctly, sticking fast, the people, concerned about them in London, were getting into active ways. Mrs. Giblets, and her daughter Mary, now went out along the streets, and across them too, almost as calmly, as if it had been Northernhay. Finding no harm come of this, they began to despise both road, and pavement; till the widow of Barnstaple's mayor, at last, took to hitching up her dress, and holding up her hand, and putting a stop to the public conveyances, as often as fancy impelled her to see, what that shop over the way was. In a word, they treated our vast metropolis, as if their own family had built it.

"Only you mind one thing, Mary," Mrs. Giblets used to say, before she tied her bonnet-strings; "if any man asketh you the way to this part, or to thiccy; you look at him, as if you knew, but refused to hold discourse with him. It is the commonest trick they have, for finding out where you come from; and then they get you down an alley; and your friends may put you in the paper." To which Mary always made reply, "Not they, mother. Have no fear for me; 'twould take a deep one to best me now. You ask Aunt Snacks, what I said to the tea-fishman. If ever you saw a man look astonished——"

"He won't be the only one, my dear. We shall astonish more than him, before we get back to Exeter."

For now Mrs. Giblets had strict orders from her brother, to leave no stone unturned, in tracing the intentions of the red-faced man. There had been some counsel, between Mr. Arthur, and his good friend, the timber-merchant; wherein, Mr. Tucker, having keen

appreciation of the great human final cause, £ s. d., urged upon his host the expediency of going, to look after that same in London. However, it is not an easy thing, to break the habitude of years, and the sense of peace; and beyond that, the captain had good reason, for not quitting home just now. His foremost duty, and entire love, bound him to his daughter there. And to leave her, in that lonely house, or to put her elsewhere, or to take her with him, would all be either bad, or doubtful. Moreover, he had his own proud dislike, of making any overture to his father, after all that had passed between them; and he felt that the hand which had driven him away, should be held out to him, before he rushed to take it. Therefore, he refused to go to London.

But an agent is often more impulsive than his principal; and so was Mr. Tucker now. To him it appeared a burning shame, that rogues should be left to work their will, through magnanimous neglect. On the captain's behalf, and with his leave, he resolved at least to watch the case, and keep him informed of urgency. And to help him, he could scarce have found a better ally, than the enterprising Snacks.

That gentleman's conduct was not wholly untainted by self-interest. He had the privilege of knowing Messrs. Powderhorn and Bullrush, the solicitors for the railway company, whose hot haste had been so impeded, by the crotchety old earl. With the arrogance of all railway-lawyers, they had taken it quite as a personal affront, that their powers of compulsory purchase should meet with even a moderate demur. To overbear all such small nonsense, was their manner, with small men. But a great landowner, like the earl, was not to be overborne so gaily; and there were some informalities about their plans, and notices, which might throw them over for another twelvemonth, if keenly sifted, by big-fee'd counsel. Therefore they hated the earl, as if he had rushed into their office—which the gout, alas, prevented—and submitted to them, for counsel's opinion, a vigorous kick at every acting partner. Being aware of this perhaps unworthy, but certainly natural sentiment, Mr. Snacks saw his way to getting a grateful allotment, below market-figures; if he could only succeed in putting a big spoke into the bad earl's wheel. So that he shared the tender interest of his Devonshire visitors, in the gloomy, and rather lonely mansion, standing within those ivied walls.

If any man wants to get into a house, where he has no right to be, let him set feminine wits at work, and defy them to accomplish it. It does not follow, that he will get in himself; but the better one

will do so, and tell him all she sees; which is certain to be far beyond his sight. And good Mrs. Snacks, being stirred up thus, resolved that the mistress of three husbands should never be beaten, by a stupid lot of maids, who understood nothing but the way to bang the door.

If there were time, it might seem worth while, to tell how this lady did get in; after carefully watching all the bays of wall, to be certain where the run might best be made. But although it was a noble exploit, who but she can tell the tale? And there is not room to let her do it; because the largeness of her mind embraces a family of fifty narratives, during the production of a single one. Enough it is to say, that some very honest fellow, who supplied the premises with something regular—whether it were milk, or oil, or ale,—was persuaded to consider half-a-crown so long, that he set down his cans against the spring-door in the wall; and Mrs. Snacks, quite overcome with the heat of the day, slipped in, and fainted. Being still unmarried, this man became alarmed, for Mrs. Snacks was of considerable size; and he hurried to the house, and called out maids; in pursuance of whom, came the housekeeper; a truly pretentious, and excellent woman, married into the name of "Tubbs." At first, Mrs. Tubbs was inclined to be haughty, and to fetch the gardener, and a groom, and send the invader to the nearest chemist's shop. But as soon as she saw a magnificent gold chain, peeping through the sick lady's mantle, and six fine rings upon the poor limp fingers, the noblest feelings of humanity were touched, and she whispered the sad words—"Cholera, syncope, collapse, I fear! Sir John says, that it is not infectious. Don't be frightened, you stupid girls. Bring the poor dear, to my downstairs room. Luckily, Mr. Gaston is from home. We are not quite savages, I should hope. Stuff! If you won't help to carry her, I will."

Mrs. Tubbs knew a good deal of medicine, and kept certain antidotes of her own; which she longed to try first upon somebody else. And so efficacious were these, that Mrs. Snacks, submitting, like a martyr, to the palatable parts, comprising very old cherry-brandy, was able to sit up, in three-quarters of an hour, and confessed to a genial glow, throughout her system.

"How sad it does seem, that we should be such poor things!" she whispered, through her tears, to her kind preserver; "but without that, how should we ever know the warm hearts from the cold ones? I suppose, that we all adhere to life; even when best prepared to go. And in my case, it would have been so sad; because of my husband, who adores me, and my child, who has such

lofty expectations. Oh, Mrs. Tubbs, shall I live long enough to thank you?"

"I trust that you will, ma'am; if you take another glass. Your colour has come back most charming. I was very near sending for Sir John Tickell, his lordship's own doctor; but you looked up at me, out of symptoms, so confiding. And you see, he could not have done much more."

"Nor a quarter so much, dear Mrs. Tubbs. I shall always declare that you saved my life. It came all across me, in such a sudden way; and you understood it, in a moment!"

"That I did, ma'am; from keeping my eyes open. What else can I do, in such a house as this? But there! I mustn't trouble you, with our affairs."

"It seems to be a sort of institution. It struck me in that light, before my seizure; and I just had the sense, to think it safer than the street. But little could I dream of such skill within."

"'Tis a queer sort of institution, ma'am. However, it is not my place to talk; and talk I never do, not to my own sister, though her husband is a tanner in Bermondsey."

"Mrs. Tubbs, you are quite right. People are so apt to pry; and gossip is so hateful. In all my life, I never could abide it, and shut myself out of many doors, through that. You may know what I am, when I tell you, that although we have a nice house, with bow windows, looking right over the Regency Park, it never hath come into my mind, to ask whose institution this was here. I look out of my windows, and my neighbours may look in; but as for a desire to look into theirs, the mere idea of a thought about it hath never been known to come into my mind."

"Excuse me, ma'am," Mrs. Tubbs replied, with a new light of interest kindling in her eyes; "but if I may make so bold, did you happen to come from the West of England?"

"From the west, and the best of the west," said Mrs. Snacks, who could tell what Mrs. Tubbs was; "my father lived at Crediton, all his life; and my brother was the Mayor of Barnstaple."

"I am not Devonshire, so to speak; or not altogether that, and that only," Mrs. Tubbs answered, with her finger-tips meeting, while she thought the subject out; "but my father was of very excellent parentage, in Somerset; and my dear mother, who I lost without the knowledge, came away direct, in early days, from a substantial house at Appledore. And if we can only find the papers, and my good husband comes up again,—which he generally does, at about three years, because he is a seafaring man,—the best authorities

agree, that no one will be able to keep us out of it. Perhaps you have heard of the matter, ma'am—West Boddlebury farm, near Appledore?"

"Of course, I have, over and over again. But my husband is the one, who understands those things; and we have very influential friends near there. Some of them are at our house now—come to see London, and spend their money. If you could manage to come, and see us, and have a bit of early dinner with us, as they do in Devonshire, my husband, who is an extraordinary man, might thank you for saving my life, or at least prolonging it—although I feel a little queer again—and you might gain some information, of the greatest value to you."

"Looking at you sitting there, ma'am," said Mrs. Tubbs, who had thought it prudent to take some disinfectant fluid, "with your fine west-country colour, such as London burns away, thinking of what you might have been in an hour, as our fishmonger was, bluer than his own mackerel fish; it do seem to me, to have been a providence, that the side-walk door was open. We have a great gentleman here, who is the master's master, as the saying goes, and keeps the household most select. None of the lower ones can get out; and he would like to keep me boxed up too. But I went to my lord, when I knew that he was in one of his kicking tempers; and I said—'My lord, is it your orders, that I am to be locked in here, after all the years that I have served you?' And he roared out—'Tubbs shall go where she likes. Tubbs has my orders to go, when she pleases, to'——not at all a nice place, ma'am, which I will not offend you by speaking of, though patronized by the nobility. And ever since that, I have made a point of taking my walk in the park, of a Sunday, and looking about for sailors' hats; for my husband must come home some day, and perhaps with a pocket full of money. For the Lord, He doeth all things well."

"Indeed He does," Mrs. Snacks replied; "my husband knows all about the shipping, and he has some connection with the Docks. Then Mrs. Tubbs, we shall expect you, at two o'clock next Saturday. We generally have a turbot first, with Aylesbury ducks, and marrowfats, to follow. But perhaps that would not be to your taste. In these large establishments, you live so well."

"Not at all, ma'am, not at all. We are kept very close here, I can tell you. We lead a very asceltic life; and have not even seen a lamb's fry yet."

"Then, my dear Mrs. Tubbs, we shall expect you. Here is my card, and our gate is never locked. Or shall we send the car-

riage for you? No, you prefer to be independent. And I will follow your example. I will just slip out, and get a cab, before that formidable man comes back. He might consider me an intruder; and that would be unpleasant to you, I can see."

"My dear lady," exclaimed Mrs. Tubbs, "I am not one, to be lorded over, by a man no better than myself. It has been going on too long. I never speak of private matters. But you will not blame me, when I come to see you, if I should make bold to consult you a little, concerning my own position, which is a trial beyond my mind, at times."

Accordingly, when this faithful person, punctual to her hour on Sunday, had made a pre-eminent dinner, and admired the view of a crowd in the park (who might be taken, thus far off, for London trees walking off their woes), and then had refused more Frontignac —a wine that has now gone the way of all fashion—because she was determined to consider slowly what Mr. Snacks had said, about investment, when she happened to confess that she had put by, in spite of hard times, just a little bit of money; and when she had been persuaded, as a favour, to everybody present, and especially her host, to relent from that refusal, and touch flower-bells with Mr. Snacks (who was an exceedingly pleasant man), really such a desire to please those, who had pleased her so much, became established in her kind heart, that Mrs. Giblets, and Mrs. Snacks, and even Mary—although she was ordered to run away three times, and so lost three half minutes, before she ventured back again—one with another, putting things together, could enter into all the affairs of that interesting house, almost as clearly, as if they had the privilege of living there.

To put into a few words a story which cost many, the present Earl Delapole, although by nature of haughty and imperious vein, in his later years had fallen deeply under the influence of a man, who had made his way upward from post to post. From the position of farm-bailiff, and rent-collector's deputy, upon a small part of the earl's estates, he had risen to be the general agent, steward, manager, and master. There still were times, when the rightful lord, who was of a very suspicious mind, would rebel, break out most violently, and order his enemy to quit his sight, and his premises, for ever. At such times, Mr. Gaston used to fling out of the house, and bang the door; but the next day, he was back again, having made himself indispensable; the tugs and jerks only tightened the noose, as a rabbit finds in a well-set wire. Mrs. Tubbs could not say, whether she considered him a rogue, or not;

perhaps, if he had not been so boisterous, and so domineering, she would have thought him deficient in principle; but she had never known a rogue, with a voice so loud, and a face so red.

The earl, being now in his eightieth year, was falling, more and more completely, into the power of this tyrant. No one ever came to brighten his dulness, or divert his mind towards any kind of charity; although he must have a mint of money, in land, and houses, and leather bags. Mr. Gaston would take good care of that. Only his doctor, Sir John Tickell, who always went about with a trumpet—which perhaps was make-believe, because he hated questions—and his lawyer, Mr. Latimer, though even he seemed to be shut out now, and his shaver (who could not be shut out); these were all that were let in now, with any sort of grace about it. If any old gentleman, who had carried on highly, in the fine old times, with his lordship, desired to shake him by the hand once more, and to lighten it up for him to hold on, and to say things witty, as they used to be—there was no other message, when his card came in, but that his lordship was in great pain to-day. And so, the very best of them dropped off; gentlemen, who must have been the foremost of their day, in carrying on high wickedness. Mrs. Tubbs liked them, because they were gentlemen; not such soft-mouths, as you see now. But although she liked them, and they liked her (as their compliments on her appearance proved), she durst not authorize man, or maid, to show them up to his lordship's room. And this had grown sadly upon the earl; quite according to Mr. Gaston's wishes; ever since the grandson died, following that poor lord his father, who had never been much to speak of. However, it was known among the older ones, that there was another son somewhere, or at any rate there used to be; but the earl had refused to have him mentioned, because of some trouble that he had been through. And although he might forgive him now, for the sake of the land, and the title, Mrs. Tubbs was sure, that Mr. Gaston would bang the house-door in the face of repentance.

"That is how things always goes, with our great families," said Mr. Snacks, a liberal of the largest order, who liked the world to go up and down. "Men who think that nothing less than a coach and four, of their own driving, is fit to come through their property. Their time is pretty well up, on this earth. But the son, if there is one, should be looked up; to make a good title to the company."

Through the caution of the timber-merchant, none of those present knew, that the missing son could be found on Dartmoor; though some of them began to suspect it.

"But if these troubles go on much longer, what am I to do?" asked the good housekeeper, who felt that she might have unburdened her mind, to bring worse burden afterwards; "I can throw up my situation, of course; and goodness knows, it is a gloomy one."

"No, ma'am, no!" exclaimed Mr. Snacks; "you must not contemplate such a step. For the good of the family, you must not do that. You are so placed, that an immensity depends upon your discretion, and forbearance. To-morrow is Monday. I will feel my way, towards getting you those shares we spoke of. If I succeed, as I fully hope to do, your money will be doubled by Friday morning. My investments are never speculative; but sound as the Bank of England. I will not say a syllable, to disturb your mind. Cast off every thought about it. I shall act for you, with even more discretion, than I should employ about my own affairs. And I think I can promise you another thing. From my intimate acquaintance with the Docks, I shall have the pleasure of telling you next Sunday, if you most kindly repeat your visit, the latitude, and longitude of Captain Tubbs; and perhaps the very day when he must come home, after making all allowance for wind, and weather."

This brought a very nice smile into the eyes of the house-keeping lady, who was not so very old; and if Mr. Gaston could have seen, how warmly and gratefully she wished her new friends good-night, perhaps it would have made him grind his teeth, and hesitate about his next proceeding.

CHAPTER XXXII.

UNDER THE ASH TREE.

THE evening of a ripe summer day was slanting down the western heights, and spreading waves of peace and rest (too soft to be called shadows yet), along the fertile lowland, and the villages, where people talk. The striped proceedings of the harvest, and the winding tree-girt roads, and meadows coned with hay, uncarted still (because of summer floods), patches also, streaked according to the coat they had put on (whether of beans, or rape, or turnips, or the hungry and hungrifying potato, or brown vetches spent in pods), and the green leisure of soft pasture, frilled with alders by the brook—

these, and a thousand other beauties, spreading wide content to gaze at, lay in the mellow summer eve, below the rampart of rough moor.

Returning from Christowell, in time to get her father's supper ready, Rose, with one hand full of wood-bine, blue-cup, and dark beads of worts, espied a lovely place to rest in, and enjoy the varied view. A bend of the wandering lane lay open, where a gate had once kept guard; for time had dispersed the gate; and man, and his cattle, had dispensed with it. Over the moss-browed granite posts, (whose heads were antlered, like a stag's), a grand old ash-tree, hung with tassels, spread a cool awning, to improve the sight. Ferns, and fox-gloves, and puce heath-flowers, fringed the descent of the steep foreground; while the lowland distance wavered with the slowly gliding shades of hill.

Here she sat, to think a little of the beauties earth presents, and perhaps (although she was so young) of the many troubles it inflicts. She was capable—as she thought—of putting two and two together; but this capability had not brought the comfort of so rare a gift. Nothing came of meditations; and perhaps the wisest plan would be, to stop them altogether. But this was easier said, than done; none but the most commanding minds can turn their pressure off and on: and Rose was not given to pry continually into her own machinery.

The sweetness of the hovering light, and calm of summer fragrance, were enough to make one think of nice things here, and scorn anxiety. Far in the distance people clearly were at work, but made no noise; and nearer toward, at the hill-foot, cows (as quiet as the milky way) jotted the winding meadows, with slow movement, seeking the prime of dew. There was nothing to disturb one's mind, under the dignity of that tree; unless the disturbed one brought it with him, or let himself be vexed (through excess of sensibility), by the lightly mended fractures, which the Christow made a murmur of. In defiance of breakage the brook flowed on; in erasure of shadows, the evening spread; and over the lines of care and trouble, the young heart passed into the like repose.

There could not have been a better time, for any one to look at her, with her head reclined against the granite pier, and her hat full of flowers by her side. The rugged face of the stone set off the delicate damask of her own, and the hoary lichens, of a hundred years, made a foil for the brightness of silky young locks. It was doubtful, whether she was half-asleep, or wholly thinking; but in either case, a gentle smile was sweetly resting with her. And not to disturb its

beauty, or his own delight in watching it, a young man (who had come softly up the turfy slope) drew back, and pondered.

By some strange gift of time, and place, this happened to be John Westcombe, who had long been in a condition of mind, more easy to feel, than to describe. It had neither been distraction, anguish, transport, misery, temerity, abasement, nor any of the many dark profundities of despair. Rather, there had been, from time to time, some element of all those moods, combining undesirably, and confounding self-inspection. And now, to see the cause of all this stir intensified it. For since that day at Fingle-bridge, he had only seen her far away, although he had diligently fished the river, to the utmost of his privilege. "This is a fair chance now," thought he, "on neutral ground—the Queen's highway, or at any rate, a parish road. Am I to go on like this, for ever, until some dishonourable fellow cuts me out? How sweetly lovely she does look! There never was any one like her."

For her simple dress, long-waisted, flowing (and neither skewered in, nor scrimped to show a foot squeezed into a lobster's claw, nor thatched with stripes of hideous hues), followed the elegance of her form; as nature's self would have provided, if the human race were born in husks, as a comely filbert is. The finish of every part was perfect, like a sculptor's dream (but happily quite unlike his deeds), from the tapering finger-tips, and nails, resembling the aforesaid filbert, to the carven curves, and flexured tracery of soft little ears, that had never been bored. To these Jack Westcombe thought it now good time to make his love's appeal.

"You did not know that I was here. I came up, quite by accident. And I hope you won't be angry with me, for—for looking at you?"

"After all your kindness, how could I be angry with you, for—for looking at me?"

"But I want you to do a good deal more than that. I want to tell you, if I may, the continual things I think of you. You cannot understand them; but I should like to make them clear to you."

"But how can you do that, if they are beyond my understanding?"

"Not at all," said Jack; "if you will only try to put yourself in my place. Suppose that you loved anybody, with all your heart, and for all your life. The first thing you would want to do, would be to make it clear to them."

"But they would be sure to know it. Why should I tell them, what they knew already? They would feel, that I was doing it."

"Then do you feel, that I am doing it, doing it ever more, for you? And if you do, are you vexed about it?"

Rose had risen, and was looking at him, with maiden bashfulness, and some grief. "You are not thinking what you say;" she said.

"Yes, I am. I have thought about it, for days, and nights, and weeks, and months. Ever since I first saw you, nothing else has been really in my thoughts. I cannot expect you to care for me yet; but only say, that you will try. Put it in this way to yourself. Say, 'here is a fellow not worth much, and in no single way to be compared to me. But he loves me, with all his heart and soul; and lovely as I am, I never shall get any body else, to do it half so well.'"

"Really, Mr. Westcombe, if I am to talk to myself like that, I must be a mass of self-conceit."

"So you ought to be. And then, go on like this—'although I don't care about him now, and he does not come up at all to my ideas, it is my duty to give him fair play, and not for a moment to entertain a single thought of any other person; until I have tried my very best to like him.' Now, will you promise to consider it like that?"

"Surely your ideas of fair play," she answered, with a smile of pleasure at his skill in putting things, so as not to terrify her, "are fairer to yourself, supposing that—that you make a point of me, than they are to any other person; such as I am not to think of."

"How can I argue with you," said Jack, contriving to get very near to her, without any perceptible nearing, "unless you could spare me your hand, that I might count my reasons on it?"

"I am afraid, that I ought to go home;" said Rose.

"Thank you for being afraid;" he answered, with much ability offering his hand, in the manner of one who says, 'Good-bye;' "because it seems almost to mean, that you are not afraid to be with me. It seems almost, as if you were beginning at last to understand, just a little, how I worship you."

"Hush! You must not use such words. It is quite sinful. You may say 'love' me. But——"

"Oh, if you give me leave to say 'love you,' I shall care for nothing more. Come, you can never call that back."

"But I have given you no leave at all! You are taking the whole of it yourself," said Rose, as he began to count her fingers, in one of the many bedazements of love, as mothers count the baby's toes—"Good-night, and good-bye, was the leave you were to take. And if you won't do it, I must do it for you."

"I am off, at once. Or at least I shall be off, before you can

count ten. Only before I go, be so very kind, as to do me one little favour. You know that I am not unreasonable?"

"I have always thought that of you, until—till now."

"I will do my best, for you to think it still. I ask you nothing more than this—to give me both your hands, and say—'John Westcombe, I will think kindly of you."

"Why those are the very words Sam Slowbury says, that his wife used to him; and whenever they quarrel, he reminds her of them."

"I shall be quite content to be reminded of them, fifty thousand times, if the result is the same in our case." This was confusion of thought on Jack's part. But what better could be expected? For Rose, with her gentle graceful manner, gave him both her hands, and said—"Mr. Westcombe, I will think kindly of you."

The bloom of a bright blush deepened on her cheeks, as her eyes met his courageously; and then she turned her face away, lest any tell-tale tears should own, that her promise had been fulfilled already.

"I will ask no more," John Westcombe said, longing to see her face again, but like a man, forbearing; "you have given me all that I can expect. There are many obstacles between us. But as sure as I love you, they shall vanish. Now darling, give me one sweet flower, from where the sweeter head has been."

A tear fell into her nosegay, as she stooped to choose a pretty one; and without a word, she gave him a truss of woodbine, seven sweet rosy bells.

Then she took up her hat; and trembling fingers played among the other flowers; because he might think her sadly stingy, for only giving him that one.

But it was the one, on which the tear had fallen, as Jack's sharp eyes had perceived with joy.

"This flower shall be with me all my life," he said, as he held it reverently; "now Rose, my Rose, I must see you home; because there are great rogues about. You shall go in front, and I will watch you; as I mean to do all my life."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AMONG THE CORN.

When big rogues are about, which happens seven days in the week at least, honest men, and women, feel the deepest interest in them. Not from fear alone; oh no, even the women are not afraid; but

partly from pure joy at having one's neighbour robbed, and not oneself; and partly from jealousy of beholding enterprise beyond one's own. Any play, that has a fine thief in it, makes us heartily thump the floor; and the tale of his life holds us suspended, until the dear hero is *sus. per coll.*

Any such romantic doings of the night are doubly refreshing to the human system, in the glare of day, and the social glow, and the radiant encouragement of a large beer-can. And when the men have worked hard, and earned their talk, and have women among them, at once to enliven, and chasten, the tenour of their discourse, the truth of their tales receives a flash of fancy, at which they will shudder, when they go home, in the dark.

"Farmer Willum" (as Mr. William Bird was called, to distinguish him from his brother John) was renting, besides his Moorland farm, on which he would never think of trying to grow wheat, a snug little piece, of about thirty acres, down in the lowlands below Christowell. Here there was rich alluvial soil, stolen by the river from its earlier stage, and spread out well above the reach of floods, for man to stick his staff of life in. And Farmer Willum had stuck it in well, with stable support, and the increment of cows; ere ever the farmers began to be cheated, with stuff they now test in their tobacco pipes. But not to say a word, that might afford ground of action to any artificial company, it would be a libel to deny, that Farmer Willum had got a very prime piece of wheat just here. He was as proud as Punch, about it, although he only said—"Middling, well middling. I have seen worse, and I have seen better. In these bad times, us must be thankful, for aught that it pleases the Lord to send. But a' never would have been like that, without sixty load of muck, as I drawed in."

Now the day was come for reaping this, after Farmer Willum had been in and felt it, and found the kern gone out of milk, and looked fifty times at his weather-glass, and tapped it with his knuckles, every time, to detect any wavering of its hand, and listened for it to tick—for he never could understand how it could go without ticking; and after a long council with his wife, who despised a clock that never told the time of day, down he went to the *Three Horseshoes*, on a Saturday night, when all the useful men were there; and he said, through a beard that would be reaped to-morrow,

"Drat the weather; I can't make head or tail of 'un. And John Sage never cometh here now. But rain, hail, or shine, I've a made up my mind, to cut they three Ox-lands, Monday morning. Any

of you lads, as has worked for me afore, come into the traveller's room, and speak your minds concerning it."

And now, here they were, and had been hard at it, up to eleven o'clock of day, according to the stroke from the high church-tower, which came down the valley, and rejoiced their hearts.

Then they flung down their sickles, and they left their binds; and the children, who had long been endangering their spotty fat legs, among the flash of steel, raced down to the ditch, for their fathers' knotted kerchiefs, or hats, according as the case might be, and brought them with a dutiful sniff at the contents, to the spot where the cider-barrel stood upon its wheels.

The sun was very strong, and it was time to call a halt. Brawny men wiped their reeking brows, and untied the fillet, that kept their shaggy hair back; and some, with stiff legs bowed by straddling, went down to the brook, to cool arms and faces. The rest made straightway for the cider-barrel, where Mrs. Willum sat upon a milking stool, to temper liberality with justice. And this was a thing requiring care, and quick memory, as well as strength of mind; so many were the tricks of crafty men, coming with a hat on, coming with it off, coming with their neighbour's hat, meanly sending their neighbour's wife, when their own had had it; and worst of all, turning their coat, like liberals, for the sake of another pint out of the spigot. But the farmer's wife was tolerably sharp; and the sharpest of them cheated her no more than twice; and that was the stupid Sam Slowbury.

For this was a man of such deliberation, and so many children, that a very distant gaze was needed, to take a sinister view of him. His countenance alone, and his style of thinking—which could be seen in his forehead when he did it—and the gentle kindling of his eyes, when he began to begin to understand a thing; and above all, the slow and steadfast wrinkles of his smile, which came like a summer ground-swell, as soon as it was impossible for him not to understand—these, and many other gifts, to be envied more than imitated, proved, beyond doubt, that if nature can be trusted, Sam was the last man she intended for a rogue.

It is not within the present limit, to enter into, far less to settle—as every one does to his own content—points of extreme, and extremely vague delicacy. But for the sake of human nature (which, in spite of its own convictions, does not always know exactly what it is about) it is only fair to say, that if Sam Slowbury was a rogue at all, he was so, without privity of his own conscience, and purely for the sake of his family.

"Missus," he said, when he had done some of his dinner, but kept some more to be done yet, and a horn of cider to go after it; "if 'e can foind to spare a minute, come, and zit upon this here stook, out o' the zin; and tell up a bit."

Betty Sage—for Sam was speaking, with this freedom of address, to no less a person—looked at Sam, as much as to say, "Young man, you are making too bold, with your betters." But it came to her mind, that the harvest-field might level, for the moment, even the distinction, between the head-gardener of a colonel, and a mere captain's understrapper: therefore she smiled, as Sam showed his horn of cider, and letting down her linsy-woolsy, followed to hear what this labourer might have to tell her.

Slowbury's wits were at their best, because he had been working hard, being compelled to keep pace with the rest, unless he were prepared to taste reaping-hook; and the movement of his body had worked his mind up. Moreover, he was conscious of some cash in pocket; and his consciousness was brisker to rejoice therein, than his conscience to repine at it. And who shall blame the parent of so many small bread-baskets?

"Why, Sam! I never knowed 'e look so peart," Mrs. Sage began, almost before they had settled their quarters, upon the two stooks, in a corner the sun had done with; "whativer hath come to 'e now, Sam Slowbury? Too much zider, I reckon—hand me over. I han't had a drop, to count on."

But this solution of his "psychical phenomena," by a disinterested observer, was not satisfactory to Sam. "Naw, naw," said he; "pl'aize to baide a bit. The turn of the women-volk beginneth, when the time of the men be zatisfied."

To illustrate this, he sloped his horn, displaying a throat, well adapted for its duties, and intent upon them now, according to the evidence of a sliding lump in front. This was observed by Betty Sage, with a large and liberal contempt.

"Did 'e drame, thou zany, as I wanted thy zider?" she asked, as Sam laid down the empty horn.

"Your maister be getting on bravely, they tell, over yonner to Ockington," said Slowbury, with his tones refreshed; "I have a'-heered zay, putting wan thing with anither, and allowing of what a' bringeth home on Zinday, faive-and-twenty zhillin' a week, be not a brass farden below the vally!"

"What heed of thaine, Sam Slowbury?" inquired Mrs. Sage, leaning forward on her stook, and with sternly set wrinkles, regarding him; "'tis the brains as doeth it; and if the Lord, in His

wisdom, hath not gifted thee with a haverage, He hath made it thy dooty not to grumble."

"And I be not a'-grumbling," answered Sam, humbly fingering his big head; "I be quite zatisfied, with my haverage; though a' don't vetch their vally, out of harvest time. But I coom here, to do 'e a good turn, Mother Sage; and all I gets for it, is to foind 'e a-zitting in the zeats of the scornful."

"Not the worst of my henemies can say that of me," Betty Sage answered, with politeness, as Sam began to fill his pipe, with a nod of superior indifference; "if thou hast aught to say, Sam, say it. Thy moother was a sensible woman, before thee; and many's the good turn, I've a'doed her. And her always said 'my son, Sam, will repay thee.' Can 'e call to mind the red-brick taybeggin?"

"Ay, and the lather there was, when I brak 'un; because her were a marriage-present. So be, Missus, I'll be toord, and tell 'e. Don't 'e let your maister ever goo to Weist-Tor, of a Friday night He be getting on in years; but the life of him wur gived to him, for so long as he can count it."

"And why, if you plaize, Sam Slowbury, is John Sage to be denied of going to Weist-Tor, of a Friday night? Hath a' doed any sin, for Old Nick to grab 'un?"

"No more nor the main of us, to my knowledge, Missus. And old John be pretty wull a match for Old Nick, with his General sin, to help 'un. But though a' was a fust-tly wrastler, on a time, and could show a good fall yet, wi' sich a chap as I be; what could a' do, Missus, what could a' do, wi' a score of big men a' top of 'un?"

"A' maight crape out. A' can turn winderful," the old lady answered, with a smile at thinking of some of her husband's stories; "but who be they, that he be bound to ware of?"

"I've a' told 'e enough," Master Slowbury answered, shaking all the sheaves of the stook, as he got up. "Rippers be to wark agin; time for me to vall in, or vorvet dreppence."

"Reckon, thou wilt spake agin bumbai. Us shall have to wait upon 'e, zupper-time."

"Missus, it goo'th agin my conscience; and nort but old times wud a' made me zay the words as I have zed. Don't 'e tell no one. For good now, don't 'e."

"I'll pay the dreppence, Sam, for half-an-hour of thee. For good now, stop a bit, and unfold thy maning."

"If I wor to spake anither word," said Slowbury, buckling up his breeches' strap, to go to work again; "twud be worse than the procading of thic beastie, by the gate."

Farmer Willum's donkey had come down the hill, with a basket of refreshment for Mistress Willum, and the maids of the farm, who were hungry; and perceiving no sign of the like for himself, was unburdening his grievances in a loud hee-haw. "You get along, I don't attach no importance to 'e," Mrs. Sage exclaimed, as Sam strode away, with his rip-hoop swinging; "thy moother were a fule, before thee; and I doubt, whether thou be bigger fule, or rogue, Sam Slowbury."

Although her mind was eased by this discharge, in a minute or two, it became again uneasy, as she saw Sam swaying in the reaper's rank. He was the biggest man there, save one, and he seemed to make the cleanest sweep of all; and he laughed, beyond the power of the rest, at jokes, without taking any pains to make his own; the which is the wisest of all human wit.

Betty Sage watched him, and went reasoning with herself, that he must have something in him, to behave like that. And when the reapers halted, in the bottom by the hedge, and one of them sought counsel of Sam, and he scolded a fellow of some cleverness, for setting the stooks up badly, Mrs. Sage was glad indeed, to see Betty Cork come up the rigs.

"I hope I see you well, ma'am. How hot the sun be! But her maketh no difference to your complexion. Ah, Mrs. Cork, with my John away so, I can hardly pronoonce the words inside me."

Mrs. Cork, who was the mother of Solomon (now earning his keep and £5 a year, under my lady at Touchwood Park), and herself kept the chief shop in Christowell, was not come to work, of course, but to look at the work, and deliver her opinion, and jot down the names of the men who were earning corn-wages, and must be looked up next Saturday night, to pay their debts, ere ever they spent them. But though Mrs. Cork had an eye to business, as every one must have to live thereby, she was not above enjoyment of herself sometimes, and of pleasurable doings around her.

Moreover, Mrs. Sage paid ready money, though she might have had credit up to thirty shillings, if she booked her orders; and Mrs. Cork, being of liberal mind, refused to be irritated by the lies, that came to her shop, about old John spending all the loose of his money at Ockington. Her faith in him was, that he kept it all tight, and could not even bear to run a bill up; because of the pain accumulating, until the time of settlement. These meditations made Mrs. Cork, although with her holiday gown on, speak quite as if Betty Sage were her equal.

"And I hope I see you well, ma'am, also," she replied, with an

elegant nod of her bonnet; "if you are as good as your looks, Mrs. Sage, we never need tremble about 'e. 'Tis the sperrit as keepeth our heads up, ma'am; and I wish I wur like 'e; sometimes that I do. 'Tis a down-hearted thing to contend, as I do, without ever a husband, to go on at. He hath been in churchyard, seven year now; and though he took his pleasure ill-convenient sometimes; when it cometh to the slating work, I do miss 'un sadly. What a gift a' had of the rathmetick!"

A person scant of reverence for his betters (when gone beyond expostulation) might have been low enough almost to say, that the late Mr. Cork's arithmetical gifts were mainly exerted, in doubling the objects within his field of vision. But Mrs. Sage knew what mankind is, and never blamed any man, seven years too late.

"His gifts of discoorse led 'un into faine society," she replied, as she made a soft place for Mrs. Cork; "I've a' often feared the same of my good man; but John sticketh fast by his airnings. I have heered say, ma'am, that your Master Cork could hold his own, with the best of they, as writes this papper!"

"He were the front of them, the foremost on the rank;" Mr. Cork's widow made answer, as she struck a celebrated journal with her knuckles; "I've a zeed him, many times, correct they printers, though a' never zeed a printer's press himzell! Winderful to my mind, however a' could contraive it! I takes in the papper still, for the sake of my Harry; but a' never zim'th to be worth rading now. Half the long words is gone, since they lost his vaine larnin'! Here's a bit of stuff! To think what Harry would a' made of it!"

Mrs. Cork, although she talked like this, was proud enough, as everybody knew inside the shop, of taking, and managing to make out mainly, an admirable journal of the West of England; which combined all the dash of the brightest London style, with a sharpness of wit, which is not to be got, where nobody knows his next-door neighbour.

And now she had brought this paper, not only to jot down upon it the names of her debtors, but also to astound any wide-eared friend, with an article in it, concerning Christowell. "You put on your specks, ma'am, and read that," she said.

This was not a nice thing, for her to say; but rather in the sarcastic vein of the paper she indulged in. For she knew, that no specks of the very highest power would enable Mrs. Sage to make out a single word. "Deary me! I've a been and left my specks at home," said the old lady, after a sham search among her pockets;

"but you do read so bootiful, ma'am; would you plaize put your tongue to it, for me?"

Mrs. Cork smiled, because she loved her education; and then, without even putting any glasses on, which made the feat more wonderful, to any one who heard her—which half a dozen women, and a man, began to do—she read, with such disdain of all difficulties, that she skipped them, the following remarkable paragraphs:—

"When a matter is beyond our explanation, we have always considered it the most judicious plan, to abide in our patience, until the inexplicable gradually brings about its own solution. With a certain exalted prelate, exalted above the highest scope of human reason, we have felt ourselves driven to adopt this system, because he was amenable to no other."

"Why they've got three column agin' the poor bishop, in this very papper!" Mrs. Cork stopped to say, with a breath of surprise, which proved that she did not understand the sweet manners of journalists; "but perhaps the man who wrote this, forgot all about it."

"But though"—continued this eloquent writer, "we have lapsed into the silence of despair, concerning a 'churchman,' as he loves to style himself, who is all church, and no man; we did indulge a hope, that in our peaceful county, there was nobody else we need shudder to mention. Far, very far, be it from us to institute a parallel, however well suggested, between his lordship of Exeter, and a poor man who has not had his advantages, any more than his sinecure to batten on.

"This poor man appears to be comparatively honest, and to have some very charitable feelings, such as we would gladly find elsewhere. When driven by straitened circumstances to commit a robbery, he does it like a man, and with a tenderness for women, which might afford a lesson to our admirable b——p. And, unless we are misinformed, a certain amount of good feeling characterizes this felon, which has not yet been found, though with many tears sought for, in the precincts of our venerable pile.

"But not to overpress this extraordinary analogy—for we hear that his lordship did weep last week, when he lost a fine appointment for a member of his family—our duty is simply to point out, that measures are about to be applied to this minor Dartmoor evil, which a vigorous Government should rather have exerted upon the more *crying evil* we have feebly indicated. We are informed, upon the very best authority, that as those noble dunderheads, our great

J.P.'s, only wring their fat hands, when they can spare them from their knives, and forks, and bottles of old port, at the lawless proceedings of the *unmitred* felon, a very famous general, with a name suggestive of tinder, has been ordered to encamp over against him. We have one great warrior already, in the West, qualified for the commission of the peace, by wholesale slaughter of French patriots; but the remnant of his energies has been absorbed, in the production of grouse, and some other French game.

"We can assure our readers, that we shall observe, with deepest interest, the result of this twofold experiment, this attempt to kill two birds with one stone; premising only two things—that if the poor outlaw could have limited his appetite to farmers' produce, instead of devouring the sumptuous dinner of a Sybarite high-church rector, he might have enjoyed the fine mountain air, for many years, unmolested. Also that, in our very humble opinion, that British commander, of the fire-eating name, might have received more appropriate instructions—to bombard the P——ce of our fire-eating b——p. We trust, that when he has caught the inferior felon, he may gird up his loins, to the larger, more glorious, and infinitely more needful task."

All the good people, who heard this read (as it was read by Betty Cork, with many sagacious nods at the words that went beyond three syllables), said, "thank you, ma'am; you have dooed it winderful; and winderful faine thic writing be!"

So fine indeed was it—though rather below, than above, this paper's standard—that none of the listeners could make out any more, than that the writer was a clever man as need be, but unfit to have any faith laid in him, without his right name to the foot of it. The rule, to their minds, was that any honest man could get on, with speaking simple. If he wanted to be clever, let him speak t with his voice; there was no such thing, as to laugh by ink and paper; you might as well try to get salvation, from a sermon you clapped eyes upon the parson with his pen at.

But Mrs. Sage was of keener intelligence; as the wife of the seer of the parish should be. She took in a great deal of the meaning of the paper; and added thereto a great quantity of her own. By this double process, her mind became most active, combining conception, and generation.

"Never you tell me," she screamed to Mrs. Cork (who was off, amid a rounder of "Thank 'e, ma'am; thank 'e; plaize to come again, and tell us more;"), "never you tell me that the holy gentleman, with window-blind sleeves, who hath laid his hand dree times

upon my head, and bettered me continual, be put alongside of a shape-staling villain, by the biggest thief, as ever wrat upside down. I'd scratt 'un, if I coom acrass 'un, that I wud, and gie 'un the tail of 's own talk."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

GENERAL PUNK.

YOUNG Squire Touchwood had borne, as well as could reasonably be expected, the blight, or even worse than that, the blasting of his ardent hopes.

When Mr. Arthur, in the kindest manner, set before him the state of the case, and denied him all hope of his daughter, Dicky replied, with some dignity, that he was old enough to understand his own business, and could not allow even Captain Arthur to lay down the law for him, about his own good. With orders to clear out, he must do so, although he must say that it was very hard upon him; particularly when he would be having to bunk, in about six weeks, to Cambridge. For he must keep next October term, and glad he would be to do it; for he found the people of this neighbourhood, inclined to sit upon him; and he had left three dogs, at a shilling a week for grub, in the mews near Sidney Sussex. Upon the whole, he thought, that dogs were better, to be kind to a fellow, than human people. However, he would stick up to Miss Arthur still; because he had never seen anybody like her, until he was kicked off the premises.

Captain Larks could not help smiling, at the natural mixture of his ideas, and the downfall of his sportive face, and the classical cast of woe, by Lady Touchwood compared to the 'muteness of a Niloby.'

"Don't be too hard, sir," he said; "I shall have to bunk, in next to no-time; and if I could go away without being sacked, it would keep me to the scratch, and set me fine. I know, that Miss Arthur is a million cuts above me. But still, I might think; and it keeps me thinking. Old Jakes, or at least I mean our Senior Tutor, says that nothing has ever been proved against me, except some want of thought, and a leaning towards trivial amusements. But this is so long-winded, and so bursting, that I am sure he would approve of it."

"You put these matters in a light quite new to me, but perhaps a very excellent one," said Mr. Arthur; "of our great universities I

know nothing. If it will help you, in your *curriculum*, as I believe you term it, to call upon me, when you come home for the holidays——"

"But we never come home for the holidays, sir. We go down for vacation."

"Well, when you are vacant, or whatever it may be, we shall be very glad to see you again. Your mind is a very candid one; and open to good impressions."

"I tell you, sir, whatever you may think, that nothing can ever be a patch upon the impression, I am suffering from. But as facts are against me, I must go. No gentleman could do otherwise. Only I would like to have two things settled. First, that a dreadfully stuck-up young fellow, of the name of Westcombe, shall not be allowed to take advantage of my absence, and jockey me (as we say at Cambridge), by dodges, such as we cannot stoop to; and again that I may be allowed to come, and say 'good-bye,' before I go back to old Alma."

"Certainly, if I am at home, we shall be very glad to say 'good-bye;' though there must be nearly two months yet to run. But as to Mr. Westcombe," said the captain smiling, "I cannot undertake to warn him off the premises, any more than has been done already. He is a good young man; and you should do him justice, like another man."

"Well, he may be good enough;" Squire Dicky confessed, in his fine candid manner; "but for all that, I call him exceedingly nasty. I like a man to be honest, and upright, and come to the front-door, as I always do; instead of going fishing round the corner. Now, sir, please to make a mem. of what I say. I have seen a good deal of the world, in my time; and I never knew any good come, of those fellows, who stick up to be everything wonderful. If anything happens to your house, worse than our reverend friend had to put up with, you will find, that the blame lies upon that young Westcombe. He rushes all over the moor, like a moorman; and he must fall into bad company. And you know, as well as I do, what comes of that."

"But, Mr. Touchwood," Captain Larks could not help saying; "surely it is not Mr. Westcombe; but somebody else, who in a youthful manner, seeks the society of sporting men. You called him a 'stuck-up young fellow,' just now; though he must be four or five years, your senior. And if that means anything, it seems to mean, that he would hold himself above——"

"Begging your pardon, sir, for interrupting you, it seems to mean that, to a certain extent. But I have had more experience, than you

might suppose, to look at me. And I know what men of that character always prove to be, at Cambridge. Till you come to know them, you would fancy that butter would not melt——"

"If I may interrupt you, in my turn, I would say, that such things might be spoken more fairly, in the presence of the person they concern. Or at least, that some instance should be given."

"That is the very thing; they take good care, that there never shall be any instance to give. I have nothing particular to say against him. I give you my general conclusions, founded upon his behaviour to me; which has not been that of a gentleman. I thought that he was after my sister Julia; which would have been a very proper thing. And poor Judy thought so too, as I may tell you; of course, in the strictest confidence. I offered him a shake-down at our place, and the run of my best Imperials. But he preferred to have a crib, at Parson Short's."

"We had better quit the subject. He behaved quite rightly, in declining your hospitality, under the circumstances. When you are older you will look at things more fairly. Take the word of a man, who has seen something of the world; which you fondly imagine you have done. Hold your own course resolutely, when it is a worthy one; say nothing, against those who cross it, unless you say it in their presence; and make more allowance for their view of the question, than you expect them to make for yours."

"I have a great deal to thank you for," replied Dicky, who was not ungrateful; "but I'm blest, if I can make much allowance for that fellow. You bear in mind my warning about him. I always stick fast to what I have said. Right, or wrong, I stick to it; though many people call me a duffer. Good-bye, sir; you may trust me to come again, before I go up."

It was all the more unfair, on the part of Squire Dicky, to go on in that style about Jack Westcombe, because he knew not a syllable as yet, of what Jack had been saying in the gateway. The knowledge of that might have hurt his feelings, beyond all reserve of judgment; as a man who tumbles into a liquid manure-tub, when delivering a lecture on astronomy, must be pardoned for loss of philosophy. But the young squire, humble though he was in many ways, could not help thinking, from his knowledge of the fair sex, that he ought to get on with them, at least as well as Westcombe did. Jack had not half as much to say, as Dicky, neither did he understand the style of dresses, or the turn of thought shaped to some half-a-dozen types, which the young lady chooses, and changes, very properly. Dicky's knowledge of these subjects made him always most agreeable, if he only got a

fair chance of displaying it; while it enabled him to be, when baited, nicely disagreeable to all of them.

On the other hand, Mr. John Westcombe now was full of magnanimous ideas. He felt an extremely contemptuous charity—which could not in such a case be rendered into "love,"—towards the versatile, and lighthearted Dicky. No provocation would have made him punch the head of his rival, in the present fine state of things. He bore with him well; as the man who has got into the right box, sympathises with the outsider—a sitting down sympathy, which abides in its breaches. Not that John Westcombe was at all cocksure of winning his beloved Rose, for a long time to come; only that it became a joy to him to find, that the other fellow's innings were cut short. And reason as we may upon such a state of things, they turn out to be both above, and below, reason.

"I am going to tell you something, father," said the youth to the colonel, at a genial time, when a quiet, and solid repast had been dealt with; or in plainer English, after a good dinner; "we shall have visitors to-morrow; and I dare say, as long as there is anything to shoot, General Punk will stick here."

"My dear boy, your tone is inhospitable;" the father replied, with mild reproof. "My old friend is coming, to enjoy himself, and also to afford us pleasure. He has been a highly distinguished soldier, and must not be made light of, because no longer wanted. Under Providence, he has contributed greatly to the discomfiture of our foes. He deserves our best welcome; and he shall have it."

"You may trust me, sir, to be at his service wholly; even if he shoots me, as he partly did, last time. All I mean is, that I shall have little chance of a quiet talk with you, when he begins bombarding."

"He discharges his battery, before he has unlimbered;" Colonel Westcombe answered, with some grave thought; "but it is delightful to see how he smiles, when he seems to have brought down something. His eyes are not capable of fine discrimination, after all the powder smoke they have been through. I shall observe him very carefully, my boy; and if I find him worse, than he was last time, we can simply load him with blank-cartridge. You are a good shot. Fire, when he does; and bring him whatever you knock over."

"It is the only safe plan, I believe;" Jack Westcombe replied, as he rubbed his left leg, where he still had a pellet of the general's bombardment. "And if we put in five drachms of powder, he would never find it out, through want of kick. However, let him have

some shot, the first day, and see how he goes on with it. There is one great comfort, that as he cannot walk, he nearly always fires over other people's heads. But the great danger is, when a hare gets up. Keep behind him, father, I entreat you. Let him shoot *Nous*, or Mr. Short, or me; if he must hit something."

"He seems to have a gift of hitting something; though not at all the thing he aimed at. But we will hope for the best, my boy. What was it, you were going to say to me?"

"Well, sir, I was thinking that you ought to know, that I had the good luck to meet Miss Arthur, two or three evenings ago, as I came up from fishing in the valley; and I said to her——"

"You promised to have nothing to say to that young lady; until I had some explanation with her father."

"I know I did. But upon the understanding, that you should have it speedily. Well, that must have been nearly six weeks ago, sir."

"Well, suppose it is. I don't call that much," said the colonel, with his broad grey eyebrows moving. "I tell you that is no time; and you have behaved badly."

"I call it a very long time;" answered Jack, looking at his father, with the very same glance, which the latter would have given five and thirty years ago; "and begging your pardon, I have not behaved badly. But I should have behaved very badly indeed, and in my own opinion, sneakingly—if I had passed her like a stranger; simply because you hang fire so long."

"You express yourself in a most disrespectful manner; and until you beg my pardon, for using such language, I shall not regard you as a gentleman."

The colonel, in this most tremendous, and at the same time almost tremulous, state—for he never had such a quarrel with his son before—doubled up his napkin, and cracked an early filbert (of the thin-shelled Cosford kind) with the napkin, instead of the crackers; and crunched up the nut without a bit of salt, to prove the tranquillity of his mind. And instead of looking any more at his son, he directed his gaze at the decanter-stoppers first, and then higher, and higher, until he took in all the ceiling.

"Sir," said Jack Westcombe, though his feelings too were hurt; "I confess that I spoke disrespectfully, and deserve to be well thrashed for it. I beg your pardon with all my heart; and will promise to do nothing of the kind again."

Then the gaze of the father came back from the ceiling, and fell upon the bright eyes of his son; and if the two had been of

any race but ours, there must have been a little scene between them.

But equally possessing that most precious birthright, self-control, and disdain of outbursts, they were satisfied to know, from each other's look, and manner, that the discord between them was put quietly away.

"Very well; now you may go on," said Colonel Westcombe; "and I will try to make every allowance for you, Jack."

"Well, sir, I went up to Miss Arthur; as any one, but a sneak, must have done. And I told her exactly what my views were."

"That you meant to marry her, I suppose, without anybody's leave, except her own, and the parson's?"

"How could I put it in so coarse a way?" the young man asked, with an undercut at his admirable father; "no, sir, what I said was very mild indeed; and I am sorry to say, that there was nothing settled."

"Do you mean to say, Jack, that you were so afraid of me, that you durst not speak out, in a straightforward manner?"

"No, it was not quite that, so much. Though, of course, you are very hard upon me. But I felt, that I could not press a young lady, very young still, and without any mother, to engage herself to me, even if she liked me: against her father's wishes, and my own father's too."

"Then, after all, nothing came of your proceedings."

There was some contempt in Colonel Westcombe's voice, as well as a little touch of disappointment, for he had taken a very great liking to Rose, and pitied her peculiar position. "You young fellows never know your own minds now."

"What are we to do, with all the other minds against us?" the young fellow asked, as if his will were only wax; "in such a state of things, what would you have done, sir?"

"Well, sir," said the colonel, "I would have done just this. I would have taken the young lady in my arms, very tenderly, but without any warmth, to alarm her; and I would have said, 'my dear, they are all against us; but if you stick to me, I will stick to you; and the Lord will carry us through with it;' and possibly then, I might have kissed her."

"Sir," answered Jack, with a smile, and a blush—for his mind was very delicate—"you have taught me the proper thing to do, next time. I am very much obliged to you; and if I ever have such luck, I shall add, 'I am acting on my dear father's orders.'"

"You will add nothing of the kind," said the colonel, trying not to smile at this bad turn of the case; "I authorize no such extreme proceeding. I have not to consider my own wishes only, nor even yours; which are yet dearer to me. I have to consider, what is right, and upright. And the matter is full of grave difficulties. And the worst of it is, that I cannot tell you, what they are. However, I think we can do no great harm, by drinking the health of that sweet girl. Fill your glass, my boy; and here is my love to Miss Rosie. I will candidly own, that I like her dearly. I would not desire a better wife for you; if things can only be brought round."

"I don't care, whether things are round, or square," cried Jack, after standing up (as decency used to require, when a lady's health was given); "but if you are with me, sir, (as you have now pledged yourself,) the only trouble for me is, to make her love me."

Having a very vast opinion of his son, Colonel Westcombe would not say a word of any sort, upon that particular question; upon which Jack was hoping for a good word, to encourage him. His father guessed as much; and looked mysteriously at him, with a shake of his head, and a tightening of his lips, and a well-meant effort at a formidable frown. Then in fear of having gone too far, he said—"Let us go and see where John Sage is."

There was nothing, on the turnpike roads of England, to be compared now with the *Quicksilver* mail; which ran, at the full speed of horse, whip, and man, right away from Exeter to London; and back again, in the duplicate; crossing one another, with scarcely time, for Jehus to lift elbow. Although the rail was open now to Bristol, and yet westward, the *Quicksilver* held her own—from her haste she was a female—and swallowed up the plains, and the hills as well, at the rate of fourteen miles an hour, from the General Post-office to the *London Inn*, at Exeter. Then with a modified, but still rapid speed—far greater than that of our suburban trains—she went on to Plymouth, and even to Falmouth; with some loss of vehemence, among the quiet Cornishmen.

General Punk was not the man to travel inside the best coach that ever breathed, or panted—by means of its horses; moreover he liked to save his money, whenever he could do so, without self-expense. He rode upon the roof; and let nobody know what his importance was; because he must have had to give half-a-crown, where a shilling answered nobly. Two coachmen retired to the bosoms of their families, one at Salisbury, and one at Exeter, without guessing, what a hero, (both of fame, and cash,) had been sitting behind them and watching them keenly, and giving them a

shilling to be thankful for. If they had known, they would have looked each one, at his shilling arithmetically; as the time-hallowed manner of the cabman is; who seems to say, "there are twelve pence in it; and I scorn you, for every one of them."

But when the *Quicksilver* began to lose some of its too mercurial properties, westward of the faithful city; and a coachman sat upon the box, who had almost time enough to speak, without pulling out his watch; General Punk came forward well, with some very shrewd remarks about the weather; every one of which would have cost him twopence, if offered in the earlier stages. They would stand him in that amount, even now; but he knew that he must come out handsomely, when he should stop at Colonel Westcombe's gate; and having brought up his courage to a full crown-piece (for the coachman, and guard, to apportion), he might as well have his talk, out of it.

"Five minutes after time already;" he said, pulling out a vast gold watch, as they trotted between the two Tawtons; "but I suppose you don't care about time, down here."

"No, sir, not very much," the coachman answered; "we gets a lot of gentlemen, with heaps of luggage, that we ought to have left behind, of rights. Where be you going to get down, sir?"

"At Colonel Westcombe's,—Westcombe Hall, a little way beyond Okehampton. My luggage need not cost you more than thirty seconds, if you have arranged it properly."

"Colonel Westcombe is a very nice gentleman, sir. Likewise a liberal one in all his ways. We shall not grudge a minute or two, at his gate."

"My things must be handled with care," said the general; "and it takes me a little time, to get down. These coaches are made so confoundedly narrow. I have got the cramp, in both my legs, and a Frenchman's bullet in one of them. I must not be hurried, if it takes ten minutes."

"Right, sir; you shall not be hurried," the coachman answered cheerfully. "The likes of us must make allowance, for the gentlemen as have fought for us."

"This fellow will expect at least half-a-guinea," thought the general, regretting his patriotism, and relapsing into silence, to save gold. For here was one of those rich men, who look after their money sharply; having enough to make it worth their while. Neither do they value it, one halfpenny the less, for the very weak reason, that they soon must say "good-bye;" but rather, (with the loyalty of friends, who soon must part,) cling heartily, and faithfully, to every token of it

This was not the only thing, that made him so respectable. For General Punk had a hundred virtues, even more noble than parsimony. He was brave, determined, straightforward, contemptuous, candid, loquacious, tender-hearted, fiery, and conservative. And people, who began with making sad mouths at him (from the salt of his crust), very often went on (when they were compelled to do so), deeper into him, with a nicely growing relish. For he had in him that making of a liking among men, which all of us are glad to feel for, and to meet half-way.

CHAPTER XXXV.

WORLDLY WISDOM.

THE sagacious Jack had brought down a pair of steps, for he knew that General Punk was shaky, in his lower members. That distinguished officer had never been at Westcombe Hall before, and was now determined to have a good time of it. When last he came to shoot something, or somebody, in the company of his ancient friend, Colonel Westcombe was a poor man, living in a little house near Frome; and only able to procure, from wealthier neighbours, a day or two of sport, just to keep his hand in. But the general had enjoyed his visit rarely, and abstained from shooting anything, except a little piece of Jack. Now when, with the help of that young man, he was safely landed at the colonel's gate, and rendered into the owner's arms, the general counted all his boxes, blew up his man, because one of them was uncorded, and then shook hands with everybody, including John Sage, who had a red waistcoat on. "Magnificent," he said, "magnificent! I had no idea there were such hills in England."

In honour of this special guest, Mrs. Westcombe came down that day to dinner, which she very seldom did; not from any small reserve; but because she could not take food like the rest, and feared to make her visitors uncomfortable. And the colonel was in the very best of spirits, and prepared to fight his way through anything.

"We hoped to have had a very lively young lady, and a very handsome one as well," he said, "who would put even General Punk upon his mettle—my fair godchild, Julia Touchwood. But she cannot come, until to-morrow. Prepare yourself to capitulate, for the first time in your life, my friend."

"Mrs. Westcombe, I have brought my two stars with me, as big as those on the panels of the *Quicksilver;* would you recommend me to wear them? Or will they only be my death, like my old friend Nelson's?"

Mrs. Westcombe laughed, and they got on well together; for the general had always a good word among the ladies. He looked down upon them, and yet up to them; which makes them feel pleased with themselves, and their admirers.

"Jack, you be off now. We want to talk about you," Colonel Westcombe said, when the dessert was done with, and the upshot of sunset, on the brown oak beams, was quivering like water-weeds. "Take Plover, and Bell, for a run; or go, and catch us half-a-dozen trout for breakfast."

"A very extraordinary young man," the general observed to the colonel; as Jack with a bow, but without a word, withdrew. "I never could bear the idea of having a son; because they are so envious. But if I could have had a boy, of such discipline as yours, I do believe, I could have got on with him."

"You must not suppose that I have grown Master Jack, as I grow a cabbage, or a cucumber. He is the result of a quantity of care, and discipline, and good example. But in spite of all that," said the colonel, coming nearer, "he falls out of the ranks sometimes. He is a very steady-going young fellow; but he has a confoundedly strong will of his own."

"No soldier is much good, without that, when it comes to close quarters, and the bayonet."

"That is true enough, as we have often proved. But this must be taken in a different light. It is a most extraordinary thing altogether; and I cannot tell what to make of it. You remember young Pole, of the 'Never mind Whats,' as we used to call them; and the mysterious scrape he got into?"

"I should rather think I did," replied General Punk, shaking off the drowsiness of his long journey; "Westcombe, that was one of the things, which I never could make head or tail of, and never hope to do so."

"You would have said, that he was the very last man in the whole British army, to act as he did?"

"Sir," said the general, with a strong expression; "I would as soon have believed it of myself, or you."

"So would I. So would I," exclaimed Colonel Westcombe; "I had reason to love, and admire that young fellow, as I have often told you, for the very rarest pluck, and self-possession. But what

can you say, in the teeth of a man's own statement, and confession?"

"I have thought that he was bribed to confess himself a coward. A fellow may speak falsely, for reasons of his own, but cannot act falsely to his whole nature."

"I know that you have sometimes looked at it in that way; and sometimes I myself have done so. But the man lives under a ban, for his life; whether he has earned it by his deeds, or by his words. And you would not like your only son to marry that man's daughter."

"Certainly not, while the father lived uncleared. But he is dead long ago. And his daughter may be pardoned."

"You are a generous man, as well as a man of the world;" Colonel Westcombe answered, with a sad look at his friend. "But Pole is not dead. He is living here on Dartmoor; and my son Jack is in love with his daughter. And worse than that, he has engaged himself so far, that he cannot honourably draw back."

"What a kettle of fish to be sure! It serves you quite right for educating him. We never wanted any education. I can spell 'Officer,' but I can't spell 'Military.' And I don't believe the sharpest fellow on the Staff could do it; or at any rate not without three tries. What did you send him to Oxford for?"

"Because he was such a dab at Latin; and there wasn't any fighting to be got. However, it is too late, to talk about that. The question is, what am I to do? And before you can say a word upon that point, you must listen to all that I have got to tell you."

"A young fellow is generally at his worst, from two to four and twenty;" General Punk, with good reason, declared, having suffered lately from one of them. "He looks back with contempt upon boys, who are a thousand times more amusing than himself; and he is stupid enough to hold his tongue, when he might make pleasant blunders."

"Jack is a sensible fellow," said the colonel; "although he may not be amusing. But he says very clever things sometimes, according to my weak judgment. But he has not done a clever thing in this, I must confess; according to the views of the world, at least. But, my dear friend, we must not be too worldly; and when you hear the facts, you will be able to excuse him."

After this little preface, he fell to, and recounted (so far as he knew it) all the story concerning his son, and Rose Arthur. The general listened, as a judge does to a junior Counsel, with a patronizing smile, and comfortable nods, to show that he was attending.

"One thing you must remember," said the colonel, at the finish, not being wholly pleased to have it taken coolly; "the young lady is a girl after my own heart, innocent, ladylike, gentle, and affectionate; careful, and thrifty, an admirable cook, highly accomplished, most simple, and modest; not at all a chatterer, not at all a gadabout, not contradictory, not full of her own beauty——"

"A model of every feminine virtue,—except cash, and a father who can be produced."

"Well, I must expect you to look hardly at it. But as for the cash—that is no obstacle at all. Upon the whole, I prefer that she should not have it. Jack will have plenty to rub on with."

"Then you would not like her to be one of the greatest heiresses in England? I suppose that would be another obstacle, Westcombe?"

As he spoke, the general watched his friend, to test his sincerity, as the best friends do.

"That would be a very great obstacle indeed, and a fatal one altogether, because—— But Punk, you are joking. Her father is a poor man, maintaining himself by his own work."

"I did not even know that he was living," the general answered, with the smile of one, who has the clue to an astonishment; "it was said that he had shot himself; and it seemed quite natural. But if he is living, and can prove his identity, he is now Lord Pole, by courtesy; the only surviving son of that rakish old hermit, the old Earl Delapole."

"But there is a grandson, Lord Pole's son, who stands between this man, and the succession. The son of that man, who tried to screen his poor brother. I know that he is dead, but his son is living."

"Not he," cried the general; "he is as dead as this nut-shell. He was carried off by small-pox, some months ago. The poor old earl was mad about it, and would not even let the news get into the papers."

"Oh why, and oh woe—as old Dods used to say—what a difference a little thing makes! You remember the Marquis of C—— and three bullets that he carried on his watch-chain, for intercepting his three interceptors. But Pole lives such a lonely life, and is severed from all his friends so wholly, that I dare say he has not heard a word of all this. And from what I am told of him, he will not want to hear it. Is it generally known, in London?"

"Probably, among all who care to know it. I heard it; but it did not concern me much; and I never thought about it, from that time to this. But what a fine chance, for Master Jack!"

"I am sorry for the poor fellow, and disappointed on my own account. But perhaps it is all for the best," said the colonel; "he may fret a little; and he must not walk so much."

"What do you mean?" asked General Punk; "your course is clear; mapped out, as we used to say, by the march of the enemy. You nab the young heiress at once, of course; and your son is a made man, gets in for the county, where the old earl's property lies, and invites me to shoot over fifty square miles. I have earned that, by bringing you this great news."

"No," said Colonel Westcombe, looking sternly, but speaking as mildly as he could to his ancient friend, and present guest; "my boy's course is the opposite to that; unless he cuts loose from his father, and from his old father's ideas of"—honour he was going to say, but for fear of wounding his friend, said—"justice; Jack must withdraw, immediately."

"Rubbish!" quoth the general. "Quixotic rubbish! Westcombe, you are joking. Clinch the nail at once. All is fair, in love, and war. Who will ever know, that you had ever heard of this?"

"I shall know," replied his host, with the self-control which age had taught him. "And that is the first thing a man must consider. My dear friend, when you come to think, you will see that I could not act so."

"I am sorry if I have given bad advice;" the general answered warmly. "That comes of considering the interests of one's friends. But really, your scruples are quite childish."

"Wise, or unwise, they are not to be got over. If you were in my place, you would have them. Now, acting according to them, what am I to do? The position is a most unpleasant one."

"From my point of view, which you reject, the position is a commanding one. But a great deal depends upon one question. Is the girl in love with Jack?"

"That is more than I can say at present. My son is so diffident, that he fears to believe it. But I think that she likes him. How could she help it? But he has not had so very many chances."

"If the girl is in love with Jack," General Punk laid down the law, as if he were Cupid's Commander-in-chief—"allow me to put up my bad leg, in the absence of the ladies—then sooner or later, she will have him, whatever you may do, my friend; or else she is not a true-born Pole. What is she like? Has she got their chin?"

"I did not notice it particularly; and I did not know then who

she was. Her eyes took my attention mainly. Let me see—yes, she has a very good chin; pointed, without being sharp, you know."

"Then she will have Jack, you may depend upon it. The girls always have their own way now. It is not as it used to be. All you have to do, is to do nothing; if you will not make a bold stroke for it."

"I must consider. I must counsel with my wife. She always hits upon the proper course. But come, I am neglecting my duty to you. You always have one glass of Burgundy, I know. There is no gout in your system. They have knocked that pretty well out of us both. There is a good side to everything."

"I'll believe it, when I find one to my bad leg;" said the general who was not an optimist.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ROVING SHOTS.

MEANWHILE, "Captain Larks," as he liked to be called by his neighbours, was going on steadily. Of all the busy year, which surrounds the gardener, with a zodiac of clustering tasks, there is no busier time, than when he expects once more to see the Pleiads. The dry heats of summer are mainly gone then, and the nights of muttering thunder; and the drowsy weight of the air begins to tissue its track with gossamer. For the gentle dew, which has failed the short weak night, is spread abroad again, and a new bloom mantles on the seasoned leaves, and the morning, getting up when men can see it, glistens at its leisure down long avenues of lustre.

A gardener ought to be a short man fairly, so that his fruit may not knock him on the head. That he, with amazement at his own skill—which after all, has not much to do with it—may stand with his hat on, and look up, and thank Providence for its bounty, and hope to save some of it from felonious boys. For there is no other work of all the poor exiles of Paradise, beset with so many expulsive plagues, as this of their original breakdown. Man seems to know it, and to modify his hopes; or, when experience has killed them, to moderate his grumbling to the utmost. Who ever heard a gardener grumble? Farmers do so, because it is their nature; and in better days, it kept the prices up. Moreover, they find in their

work less solace. How can they identify themselves, over three or four hundred sprawling acres, with every object of their care? Their common plan is to attend to the good, and let the bad go home to its author.

Mr. Arthur (who was born a gardener, and a warrior only by after-birth) often bewailed his own size, and stature, which cumbered him in the leafy walks of peace, especially at pot-work.

"Oh, Short, my good friend," he exclaimed one day, when he had knocked half the bloom off a fine bunch of grapes; "What would I give for six inches off, and to have my head where my shoulders are!"

"And what would I give for six inches on," the vicar answered pleasantly, "and to have my shoulders where my head is!"

This proves nothing but the discontent of man—a matter which requires no proving. But the captain, on the whole, was not discontented now, if only he could have his own way. For his pears were growing ruddy from the passage of the wind—which colours fruit infinitely more than any sun—and his apples were clustering against each other's cheeks, and his grapes were swelling, like that bunchy apparatus of a cow, which society loves, but never mentions.

"I never had such a grand crop, in all my life, in spite of all the maggots, and the earwigs, and the drought;" the captain declared candidly to his pipe in confidence. "But the wasps are coming out, and the rabbits getting troublesome, and a lot of bluetits have come down from the furze. To go away now would be simple murder. And thirty new pears, from Leroy, come into bearing, that must be watched every day, at least, and the big ones fastened to their spurs with bast. All of Van Mons', or Esperen's raising, or that other old officer—what a queer thing it is, that since the peace set in, so many French and Belgian officers of cavalry have been great pear-growers. The one pursuit seems to lead up to the other. But here comes Rose! What now, my pet? How pale you look! And it takes a good deal to make my little girl look pale."

"No. Sometimes I become so stupid, that it makes me ashamed, when I begin to think."

As Rose pulled her hat off, and tried to look back, through the twinkling maze of leaves, her father set off, at a very rapid pace for a person of his age, and substance. He scattered a score of pears, right and left, even from his best nursed pyramids, and he rushed to the river-course (arcaded now with filberts which danced above the stream, for the trout to jump at) but neither there, nor

unywhere could he descry a robber. He had given chase, according to his daughter's frightened glance, and in sequence of his own uneasiness.

"There is nobody," he said, as he came back, short of breath. "What made you think there was anybody?"

"Because I saw him," answered Rose, with vivid reason. "I saw him, as clearly as I see you now. A tall dark man, with a rough coat on, standing in the bushes, and staring at me."

"Show me the spot, where you fancy that he stood. You have been a little nervous, for some days, my darling. If a man has been there, we shall find some traces."

Some clearness is required, as in marking down a woodcock, to show, among a crowd of trees, precisely the position of the something that has caught the eye. But Rose, who worked lovingly among her father's trees, and knew them all as thoroughly as her own stitch-work, led the way at once to a quick turn of the Christow, where a crest of fern hung over it. "He was in this fern; for I saw a broken frond hanging down between me, and his sandy-coloured legs."

"Well done, my dear!" said Mr. Arthur, with a laugh, to restore her to a lighter mood. "His sandy-coloured trousers, I suppose you mean, or breeches, or whatever 'tis, that adorns the rat-catcher's nether man. No doubt it was a rat-catcher, or some other poacher. Dicky Touchwood pays sixpence, a head, for live rats, to keep his new pack of little terriers in training. No place is sacred where a rat lives now."

He knew, as well as Rose, that it was no rat-catcher; but he could not bear to see her frightened in her own home-quarters.

"I thought that the rat-catchers always brought their dogs," she answered, "and at least one boy, for company. I told you what Mike Smith said to me—'if you was to give me three score pun', Miss, I would not go arattin', up the river, by mysel'.' And Mike is considered, as you are aware, the bravest man in Christowell, except John Sage."

"The fault of those excessively brave men is their tendency to under-rate their own courage. But certainly, there has been some one, or other, here; probably intending ill to my poor pears. Ah, now I see; how stupid of me! That man near Exeter—whatever is his name? The one who was so terribly put out, because he had nothing fit to hold a candle to my *Léon Leclerc*, and could not find out the name of them, although it was upon them. Depend upon it, he has heard of this new batch in bearing, exemplifying all the

recent gains. And I, like a fool, have left the labels still on some of them. I am thankful, that he has not put his saw through every one of them. Of all jealous mortals, I am sorry to confess, that a gardener is the most jealous, narrow, and secretive. His main point is, to keep his wretched scraps of knowledge to himself, most strictly. Whereas a liberal-minded man should impart to everybody everything he knows."

"And leave all the labels on his trees," said Rose; which made her father smile, while he told her that she could not see the proper force of any clear reasoning.

"But what was this jealous fellow like, my dear?" he continued, as he saw that all her little scare was over. "To rob me of my money, is a charitable theft; but to rob me of my knowledge is the rapacity of a cur."

"How can I tell what he was like, dear father; when the mere sight of him so frightened me? But he did not look like a gardening man; for they generally get into a lazy kind of stare."

"Like mine, for instance; or Sam Slowbury's, who is off so disloyally harvesting, just when his hoe is wanted most. He will make a pound *extra*, and be three months out of work, when Farmer Willum has done with him. But I told you what he said to me—'The Lord made the farm; but the ladies makes the gardening; with a contemptuous reference to you, Miss Rose."

"I am sure that he never meant me; because he told me that I had very good ideas, sounder and more solid, ten times over, than any of my father's. He believed it thoroughly. And who was I to correct him?"

"Not at all the proper one to do it. It would have been most ungracious. But I will take a walk with you, by-and-by, my dear. We will go as far as Brent-Fuzz corner. Mrs. Slowbury has a sore throat you say; we will take her some medlar jelly. And there may be something left there for us, by Master Pugsley. Let us work all the day, and have a walk this evening."

The captain was as free from small personal fear, as any man in England. But the bravest man is troubled by a prowling foe, when he has a precious home to guard. To think that his daughter could not walk in his own garden, without being skulked upon and scared, aroused not his anger only, but a stinging sense of insecurity. He watched her as far as the porch; and then returned to examine the track of the enemy. But of this he made nothing; for the ground was very dry; and the man who had been there was cunning enough. So the only conclusion he arrived at was, that he durst

not leave home for the present, without having settled his daughter in safety elsewhere.

Neither did his visit to Brent-Fuzz corner tend to reassure his mind. Sam Slowbury was not at home, but hard at work at a harvest supper about a mile away; and as he took lead in the choral roar, the breeze brought his voice up the valley, much improved by the softening influence of travel.

"He do sing bootiful!" Mrs. Slowbury whispered, wiping away an unbidden tear, whose source was more in the distance perhaps, than the deep inner meaning of her husband's words; which were, as you could make out, if you went to the barn-door, half a mile nigher to his lungs—

> "'Tis the stroke o' the clock, to be jolly, boys;
> 'Tis a crack'd plate weeps for its folly, boys;
> 'Tis a handkercher of holly, boys,
> Should tickle the prickles of the staid folk.
> When a man hath been swinging his hook, boys,
> He desarveth better than a book, boys,
> And a' must give his leg an uncrook, boys:
> By the will of the Lord, who hath made folk.
> With a hip, hip, hip, hurrah, boys!"

And a clinking of all cans in chorus.

"He do sing so bootiful; it maketh me feel sad, when I look on all they little ones, if his breath was to go from him. And the man who sang second to my Sam, last year, have got the grass gone to seed over him."

"For the sake of your family, Mrs. Slowbury," said the captain, considering the baby, who was gazing through her dangling hair at him; "you must not take the melancholy side of things. Think of your husband, with good wages now, and work for the winter before him, whatever the weather may be, if he keeps straight."

"Ah, if he only kapeth straight," she answered; "Sam had never a better maister over him. But, I tell you, sir, though I cut away the bread from my children's lips, by saying it, he be not kaping straight, down to your place."

"Whatever he may be doing, Mrs. Slowbury (and I have had grounds for suspicion lately), I will not hear a word of it, from you. It is honest, and very good of you, to wish to tell me. But I cannot have it so."

"Sir, you are a gentleman," the poor woman answered, wiping more tears away, with her baby's elbow; "and you can make allowance for a poor man as is tempted. My Sam is so honest as the day, by temper; but what can he do again they golden guineas?" With

a deep sob, she went to a little cupboard by the fire-place, and with anguish interlaced with pride, brought out a blue jar of coarse Bovey ware. It was half full of brown sugar, which she turned out on a plate; and at the bottom of the sugar were three broad guineas.

"Take them, sir," she said; "they be all foul-earned. I had them out of my Sam's waistcoat pocket, when he were a' talkin' in his sleep, one night. A thing as I never knowed him do in fifteen year of married life, by reason of the curse of Achan. When he come to feel for 'un, I said, 'Sam, Satan hath 'a sent 'un; and Satan hath taken 'un away.' And he turned as white, as this here plate. And a' hathn't had the face to ax no more about 'un. A score of times, I've yearned to go, and see you, sir, concarning it. But my mind was so upset, that I bided, and I bided."

"Bide no longer," said the captain cheerfully, "in an anxious state of mind. Put by those tempters for an evil day. I shall not be hard upon your husband, Mrs. Slowbury. A man who has an honest wife, and conscience so loud as to whisper in his sleep, when he sleeps as hard as Sam does, will come straight by-and-by, if he is well looked after."

"Well, sir, them's the very words, though not so grammary, as I laid to my buzzum, when my Sam were drunk last night. But a' must come home zober to-night, for a' hath to lay down the time to their voices, with the neck of whate, same as the first fiddler doth with his bow, in parson's gallery. Ah, the voice of 'un is foine, with no more nor half a gallon; and him goin' on for nine little 'uns now! You've took a girt lump off my mind, sir. And the Lord will bless 'e for doing of it; and the bootiful young leddy likewise."

However there was no great lump taken off the captain's own mind, as he walked home with Rose; who had formed her own sensible conclusions. Neither was his relief increased, when he met Betty Sage, going home to the village, with a big sheaf of gleaning on her back, which poked her old bonnet down over her eyes, and chafed her with stings of ingratitude.

"That's the way we poor volk zwets," cried Betty, instead of "Good evening, sir!" while she scratched at some fly, in the nape of her neck. "And the young leddies goo'th about in zilks and zatins, with zun-kivers up, when the zun be gone down."

"Don't be so cross, Mrs. Sage," said the captain—the worst advice that can be given to a virtuously indignant female. "Turn in at my gate, and have a draught of cider."

"I don't want none o' your zider, nor the 'toxicating stuff as you

makes of harmless apples. Bain't zour, bain't zour enough to zet my teeth up. But I'll give e' a bit of advice, cappen. You look to your own house more sharper. You knows no more of what be going on, than a marly-scarly."

"Run on Rose, my dear, and see whether Moggy has peppered the mushrooms. Now what is it you want to say, Mrs. Sage?"

"Nort, sir. I never says nort of my thinkings. But they all comes true, without words to them. You've got a bad man about your place, cappen. A vule to look at, and a vule to talk to; but 'a may make vules of them, as holds theirselves more cleverer."

"I suppose you mean Sam Slowbury, then?"

"I shan't say who I mane, or who I don't mane. A' looketh as straight as a crowbar. But a' hath as many ins and outs, as the pocket of a crab-fish."

"There are times of everything," thought Mr. Arthur, as old Betty trudged away; for he by dint of lonely work was become a meditative man; "times of trouble, times of peril, times of poverty, and—worst of all, times of perpetual advice. What will my next time be? I wonder. Probably one of perplexity."

He could scarcely have made a better guess, what though—as every prize-poet always puts it—he had added, to the wisdom of the snakes of Wistman's wood, the rapid acumen of the moorland fox—that reynard who dwells in the centre of a tor, and will not be dug out by the deepest archæologist.

For behold, on the following day, there were puffs of smoke in the breezy distance, and far away sounds of feeble pops, such as a little boy makes with a foxglove. Now this was General Punk, in pursuit of the colonel's grouse, who had not behaved well, but maintained an ungrateful attitude. From first to last, they could scarcely have cost anything under a guinea apiece; and their duty was, to get up at the proper distance, and tumble down again, when the gun went off. But instead of that, what they did, was this. No sooner did they see a man, half a mile away—the very man perhaps to whom (after Providence, and their parents) they owed everything, than away they went, like a flight of stars shooting upon the horizon, instead of being shot. And the one, or two, that did have the manners to lie decently, never fell at all, when they were shot at; but appeared to receive no more injury from lead, than a patient does from pills, at which he shakes his head externally.

This might have been explained very naturally, if none but General Punk had shot at them. But when Mr. Short, who was a first-rate marksman, had fired three times, without bagging a

feather, and the colonel, who was also tolerably straight, had banged more than once, with no better result, *Nous*, who had done his very utmost, came, with the young lemon setter, who had listened to his orders, and sat down, and looked at the four gentlemen, General Punk, Colonel Westcombe, and Jack, and his own valued master, with a gaze of sad inquiry. There was no contempt in it, or at any rate not much, for he had known such things occur before; and he was not a cynical dog, but capable of much indulgence to human errors. His beautiful brown eyes simply said—"Well, gentlemen, you have done very badly. Perhaps you sat up too late, last night. But do try to pull yourselves together; or else you will ruin this young dog here, who is out for the first time, and has not had my experience."

"I'll tell you what it is," said Mr. Short; "John Sage is at the bottom of all this. Westcombe, you put the grouse under his care; and he has made them as wary as himself. John can bag things; but who could bag him?"

"Passon be so peart," answered old John, with a grin; "I've a'knowed 'un bag a man, and let 'un goo out of the bag."

"Well done, John!" exclaimed the colonel, with a laugh. "Short, you'd better let old John alone, till Sunday. Come, gentlemen, I can see our luncheon on the hill, and Miss Touchwood come to enliven it. Let us have it; and then put our barrels straighter. Jack, you have not had one shot yet."

"'Tis better to have shot, and missed, than never to have shot at all;" said the vicar, with a knowing glance at his young companion; "Jack, you are in the dumps to-day; and general, even you, on your pony, have not brought so much as a hat down."

"I never shoot at hats, without heads inside them," answered the general; and again the parson got the worst of his own wit.

But after luncheon, as usually happens, a different state of things set in. Julia was there with sparkling eyes, brighter than the colonel's best champagne; and most radiant she showed herself, to every one but Jack, whom she treated with a dignified reserve. Then they laid out their plan for the afternoon, to shoot in two divisions; for a brace of old pointers had come with the food. Colonel Westcombe, and Mr. Short, were to go in one direction, while the general and Jack, with old John to help them, were to follow up a mark, and take the likeliest places, towards the eastern boundary of the moors; where they might find partridges as well as grouse, for the day of St. Giles was with them.

As it happened, the course of the sport led this division of the

party towards Christowell; and the general, with John Sage to load his gun, and lead the grey pony, when needful, parted company for some time with young Westcombe, who had hit upon a family of wild ducks, and went after them down a marshy glade.

"Sage, who lives in yonder cottage in the hollow?" asked General Punk, pointing down to Larks' cot; "what a sweetly romantic spot! Have they got any beer? My throat is quite parched; and I have had enough of shooting. The road is not so very bad. I shall just ride down. They will not refuse a tired man a glass of ale, I dare say. The good folk about here are always hospitable."

"The gentleman as liveth there, be zummut of a rum 'un, and kapeth volk out of's pramishes mainly. But he be a girt friend of Passon Shart; and if so be, you spakes the name of passon, he'll not denai thee zummut to wash down the pillum. Cappen Larks be the name of 'un."

"Very well; then you stop here, my man," said the general, handing his gun to John; "for fear of our losing Mr. Westcombe altogether. And when you have let him know where we are, you can come, and lead my pony up the hill again."

Mr. Arthur was aware that his friend Short had been asked to join the shooting party; and as the west wind brought the sound of fowling-pieces, he thought it not unlikely that the parson might come down from the moor, for a glass of his cider. To meet this chance, he begirt himself to a troublesome task of pruning, to take out a thicket of dead wood, from an ancient, and thoroughly crabbed apple-tree—a stern aboriginal of the place, unshapely, uncouth, ungenial, standing out with snags and tatters, yet knuckled here and there with clumps of fruit, as thick as a pile of toadstools. Ungainly, nubbly, fruit it was, as hard and tough as hartshorn, raspy, to the teeth, and fetching strong language out of the lips of the biter. Nevertheless, there was no such apple on the place, to bring out, and tarten up, the flavour of the gentle ones in cider; as a vein of adversity braces, and brightens, the mellowness of the genial mind. Therefore, and for the sake of contrast with the cones of shapely culture round it, the captain spared this ancient crab, and let it follow its own bent.

Working upon his light double ladder here, and taking out the dead wood with a little curved saw, he commanded the view of the track from the downs, which scarcely deserved to be called a road. And presently he espied a figure, which clearly was not Mr. Short's, coming slowly down the hill upon a fat grey pony. "A soldier, as sure as I'm alive," thought the captain; "I seem to know that

peculiar seat. But he looks very feeble, and in trouble. I must go and help him."

Getting down from his ladder, he unlocked a little spiked gate in the fence, and went to meet the stranger. The general was in danger, for the steepness of the hill had jarred his wounded leg, and he could scarcely keep the saddle; while the old grey pony, who had a will of his own, was threatening to make a rush of it. Then the captain ran up, and took the pony by the head, and the old man, tired, and trembling, and in agony, fell forward, and rested on the other's shoulder. Mr. Arthur supported him, and looked up at him, and told him to rest himself there for a while.

"God bless me!" cried the general, "who are you? If my name is Punk, I can swear that yours is Pole."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE WAY THE CAT JUMPS.

THE behaviour of a man, who has long been "under a cloud," when he finds that cloud rent open, depends very much upon his constitution; and his constitution is made up of a quantity of constituents. Towards the milder, and larger half of life, the mind begins to work, on its own account, and to seek its own wages, after a generation of steady discipline, and useful reverence. Disturbing influences (such as universal brotherhood, dread of illiberality, the worship of women, and nature, and the like, and the dreams of perfection, as illusive as herself) settle down into a wholesome desire to do one's best, and believe in it. But there still remains the tender love of the few, who still depend upon him.

Captain Larks had never set up to be a man of particular largeness. He could not abstract himself into great thoughts, and soar in a circumference far above his head. He liked his little jobs, and stuck very close to them, and was vexed, when they did not turn out well. And the stir of little interests kept him fresh, and sweet to mankind, and manly.

"You are tired, and weak, and in pain," he said to the old man, who had discovered him; "my cottage is a little way down this lane. Come, and rest there, until you feel well again."

"But you don't mean to tell me, that you are not Pole!" the general replied, as he yielded gladly to the strong man's aid and guidance.

My name is Pole. And I take you to be the General Punk, under whom I had the honour—— 'Fire and Punk' was your pet name, sir."

"So it was, so it was," the old man answered; "and I wish it was still, Pole; I wish it was still. Ah, those were the days, it was life to live in! But you ——"

"Consider me as one you have never seen before; and yet who is only too glad to have the chance of doing you the smallest service."

General Punk was in too much pain, to care to talk of any one, except himself. And he graciously submitted to be led down the hill, and taken off his pony by careful hands, and helped into the cool, and shadowy cottage.

"What a delightful nook!" he said; "take care of my leg, my dear young lady. Ah, I see, by your smile, that I need not tell you. Now don't begin supposing that I have got the gout. No such luck. it is ten times worse. Not that I mean to take the smallest notice of it. Half an hour's rest will quite set me up again. Now what is your name, my pretty dear? An old man may take liberties, you know."

"My name is Rose Arthur, sir;" she said, "and I hope to have the pleasure of helping you, a little."

"You have done that already, and more than a little. You seem to feel everything, as if you had got it. But I must soon be off; or I shall lose my dinner."

"It is not to be thought of," said the captain coming forward; "you must submit to our rough fare. To attempt to ride, ten or twelve miles, as you are, is utterly out of the question. I know what an old wound is, when jarred. Rest, and coolness, are the only things for it. We will send up a message to the game-keeper."

The general vowed that he would not have it so; and got up, to prove his activity. But all that he took by the movement was a thrill of pain, a stagger, and a biting of the lips; because he was too good to swear, in the presence of a lady. "I can't bear to trouble you," was all that he could say; for his bad leg began to get worse very fast.

Now this was a difficult position, for all three, the general, the colonel, and the captain; as well as for younger people, whose affairs were involved in what might come of it. The worst case of all was the general's; because he could nor get away from it, and was driven, by the irony of facts, to shout for a man disgraced out of the army. No one could lift him, except this man; for the

general was heavy, towards the centre of his system ; and he wanted a good deal of lifting, and refreshment, whenever Dr. Perperaps had poked at him.

Colonel Westcombe also felt the urgency of things. Here was a guest of his by right, driven, by the force of circumstances, into alien shelter. He felt it his duty to follow him up, and see that he was treated properly. But how could he do so, against the broad fact, that he was not wanted over there?

"My dear," he said quietly to Miss Touchwood, "you are very young ; but you know much more of the ways of the present world, than I do. It happens, that I cannot well go over now, through peculiar circumstances, with which I will not trouble you."

"I know that there is a maze of mystery among them," answered Julia, who was generous, and by no means always spiteful ; "but, Uncle John, they are to be pitied, not condemned ; until people get to the bottom of it. Write a kind letter, an exceedingly kind letter, to General Punk, congratulating him, upon having fallen upon his legs—no, that might seem too personal—upon being thus among good Samaritans ; and say you will only be too happy to send the carriage, with the soft linings, for him ; as soon as the doctor lets him up."

"I think that would be rude," replied Colonel Westcombe ; "not to him, I mean, but to his entertainer. You are right about writing a letter, my dear ; but it must not be to the general. It must be to poor Pole himself."

"Pole! Who is he?" the young lady asked. "How many more aliases has he got? There must be some very great secret somewhere. Uncle John, shall we ever understand it?"

"Perhaps not," replied the colonel, with a smile at her quick manner ; "and if so, it will be a little lesson to us, to attend to our own business."

"I cannot regard it, from that point of view, with any satisfaction. Because it appears to me so wrong, and so dishonest, to get into society, under false pretences. The thing of all others that annoys me most, is that my own mother, who has never been taught to bridle her curiosity, sits down before that mysterious man, as if she quite feared to say, 'how do you do?'—because the question might seem inquisitive. And then our poor Dicky is afraid of him too. In the name of the Seven Wonders, who is the man? I am sure, by your face, that you know. Now tell me ; or I won't say a single word, all dinner-time to-day."

"You never would punish both us, and yourself, to that extreme,

dear Julia. Your nature is to talk; and you cannot help it. But if other people don't want to talk, what right have we to force them?"

Captain Larks, on the other hand, as every man has his own regard, felt most strongly that of all this trouble the worst part fell on his own shoulders. He was under no debt of friendship, whatever, to General Punk, thus forced upon him; and to have his little cottage thus again invaded, was a trial to even his serenity. "I know what old Punk is," he said to himself; "and I never shall forget, how he scowled at me, upon the saddest occasion in all my life. He was bound to do so, by his own ideas; and by those I must measure him. But how differently Westcombe looked at me! There are times in one's life, when the value of it hangs upon a single gaze. I must do my best for this man, of course. But it will not be from gratitude."

It was not the trouble to his little household, that vexed him—although that was no trifle,—nor even the untimeliness of the occurrence, just when his own affairs were pressing; but what disturbed him chiefly, was the difficulty about Colonel Westcombe.

There are some few men, come across, at far and casual intervals, whom we grieve to have never met, at the age when there was friendship. It is not for their fame, or deeds, or virtues, that we long to know them; but because there is something in them, heart-akin to our own hearts. We care not, what their views may be, in politics, in literature, or any of the passing fancies of the day; but we say to ourselves—"here is a man, whom we must have loved, if we had only had the luck." And then, we sigh, that it is now too late; and fall back upon our old acquaintance.

However, it is a very ill wind, that blows no good to any one. And although young Westcombe was abashed, at first, by this sudden turn of things, and obliged to keep sadly in the back-ground —wherein he found a big black tor, to sit upon, and watch the smoke, whose lower breath had gone into the general's sick broth —before very long, things turned up so, that he could come in for his own share of them.

Partly no doubt, this was owing, as it generally is, to diligent exertions of his own. For he ventured to call, without violent intrusion, upon Dr. Perperaps; because he was in a condition of throat which loudly demanded liquorice.

"You must be very careful," said the doctor; "breathe just a little hard. Thank you, sir, thank you. As yet there is nothing to arouse solicitude. But we must not rest content with such condition of the tonsils. The trachea also shows premonitory symptoms. The

earliest indications of scarlet—but I will avoid language, that might make you perhaps susceptive. My dear young sir, I would entreat you, to abstract your mind from disquietude. This little instrument proclaims to me, that all is not quite right here;" the doctor tapped his waistcoat over several parts, for fear of hitting the wrong one; "it is well that you have applied to me, in this early stage. Has there been anything, anything external, to set up internal phlogitis?"

"I borrowed some very bad tobacco last night, from an old man of ours, whom I met upon the moor; and while I was thanking him, I swallowed a strong whiff."

"You should have consulted me at once, my dear sir. But I trust sincerely that it is not too late. You require an emultient, then a sedative, and after that a due course of tonics. Spotty, my dear, make up No. 77."

Established thus upon a course of medicine (all of which followed the course of the river), Jack Westcombe found himself upon a healthy road, to get near his darling Rose, once more. Youths of the present day, who dash headlong over every obstacle betwixt them and their loves—when assured that the money bag is on the right side of it—never would put up with such little items of scruples, as stopped Jack Westcombe. And even he was inclined, at last, to push aside punctilio; as he found the season passing, and his love no nearer gathering. Then, as usual, fairer aid appeared, and seduced him into side-long tricks. Sporetta hated Julia Touchwood, who had snubbed her nobly; and she knew that Julia had a weakness for the son of her godfather.

One day, at the top of the village, she met that nobly-principled young man, coming from his course of medicine, at her father's home of health. Jack was casting sheep's eyes up the road, that led to the captain's gate; but sternly bracing his mind towards the footpath leading to Farmer Willum's, where he now put up his horse. Then Spotty declared her own opinion.

"I call you no better than a muff," said she. "How can you carry on like this?"

"Like what, Miss Perperaps!" he inquired, looking at her loftily; "I scarcely understand your question."

"You know what I mean, well enough. Why don't you go in, and win?"

"You still speak in parables;" answered he, with a desire to be off; but a stronger desire to hear out her words.

"Why don't you show a little pluck? Or, if that is not fine

enough language for you, a little determination? You love Rose; and Rose loves you. Why don't you checkmate the old fogies?"

"Really you seem to take a most kind interest in my affairs, Miss Perperaps! Who told you, that Miss Arthur ever even deigned to think of me?"

"Bosh!" exclaimed the lady; "it is plainer than a pikestaff. But I am not going to tell you all I know." With that she showed her new boots, and said "Good day!"

"This is most unfair and most unfeeling;" cried Jack, going after her, as she knew he must do. "Miss Perperaps, my dear and kind Miss Perperaps, I beg you to explain yourself, and not to run away."

"I thought it was you, that were in such a hurry. But my dear father wants me. I have ten dozen pills to make up, before five o'clock. Good day, Mr. Westcombe."

"I'll make the pills. Or I'll come and help you. And you can have mine, to begin with; I have got at least three dozen here; and I can spare them."

"Oh, you have got some fun in you, after all," Spotty replied, with a very broad grin; "I thought you were a stick, and took them all. My father considers you a splendid patient."

"So I am; so I am. The most devoted. Oh, I won't get well for a year, Miss Perperaps; if you will only tell me, what you meant just now."

"I meant just what I said," she answered, sitting on a roadside slab, to talk. "Miss Arthur is as fond of you, as you are of her."

"That is a simple impossibility. If you could only tell me, what makes you think so, how I would, how I should—it would be so nice of you!"

"Well, I owe you a good turn, or two; and I can't bear to see your tongue so white. Did you ever pick an oak-apple, in the Fingle Valley?"

"Yes, I found a very pretty one, fluted like a love-knot; and I ventured to give it to Miss Arthur, just to look at. And I don't think she gave it back to me."

"Of course she did not. Is this like it? I stole it out of her most sacred corner, where she keeps her dead mother's handkerchiefs. And as soon as she missed it, what a way she was in! Though of course, she pretended not to care one rap. She has not the least idea that I have got it; or gentle as she is, she would slap me, I believe. And that's not all, that shows the way the cat jumps. For I began to run you down, one day, on purpose to torment her.

And her eyes—my goodness, you will have to look out, when she is Mrs. Westcombe!"

"You have made me so happy, I could kiss your hands, after you have rolled a thousand pills. But after all, it is not very much, when one comes to think of it."

"Then go, and get more, you insatiable young man. But I tell you, it is everything. Do you think I don't know, what girls are? Shake yourself together well; and go, and pop the question."

"What a practical mind you have!" he answered, with much admiration. "But how am I to do it, when I can't get in? I am under no promise about it now: but still there is a general understanding, that I am to be———"

"Backward in coming forward. Very well; don't let me advise you; or when the days of repentance come, you will say—'she did it.' My Step said that to my beloved parent, about somebody unknown, when they had a little scrimmage, last Sunday night. Therefore, I would advise you strongly, not to be anywhere, this evening."

"But how can I help being somewhere? You know where I ought to be; and you will not tell me."

"How sharp you are! You've been eating sparrow-pie. But whatever you do, fight shy, this evening, of the captain's leather-coat apple-tree. Where the hill comes up under the cliff, you know, at the highest corner of his property. Somebody goes there every evening, with her heart in her mouth, to peep over the moor; and it would never do, for you to be there too."

"Undoubtedly, I should be an interloper. I thank you for warning me to keep my distance. Miss Perperaps, I hear that Betty Sage is ill. I hope it is nothing serious."

"Not much, for her. She ate three hedge-hogs, for breakfast, on Tuesday, and they were not well baked. Her appetite was good, and she swallowed some spines; and she says that they have stuck fast in her own. But you had better tell John, to keep away from home. He will have sense enough to do that, when he knows it. His Betty would say, that it was all his fault; although he was a dozen miles out of sight; and then she might die, to prove it. But I have taken her out of father's hands; and she begins to perceive the difference. If she is only left to me, she will come round, for certain. But if my father gets another turn at her, it will be a very narrow squeak indeed. I have told her, to shut up her pill-trap against him."

"What do you think of the general's case, as you seem to form

your own opinions so? When will he be able to come back to us?"

"I can't tell. My father is getting sadly jealous; he won't let me have a turn at that old shaver. I belong to the positive school. Kill or cure, is my ticket for soup."

"And the right one, I believe;" Jack answered mildly, for he had not had time to think of it; and Spotty's strong views were strange to him; "the next time I ring the bell, I shall ask,—is Dr. Miss Perperaps at home, and her father gone away, so as not to spoil her practice?"

"I wish you would. I'd give a guinea, if you would; and I've only got one against my bill at Mother Cork's. My Step would get the message, and my criky, she would stare! But you haven't got the spirit to do it; any more than you have, to go near the crab-tree to-night. Good-bye."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

UNDER THE CRAB-TREE.

NOTHING can be further from the mark than to take a man, and how much more a woman, strictly according to self-appraisement. Nature has provided us, with things to think of, far more important than our own concerns—our neighbours in the first place, and politics, and the weather, and the last new murder, and the last old judicial joke—for our judges now are our finest jokers—and if we ever get home again, to think about ourselves at all, modesty steps in, and spoils the balance.

Conspicuous among the men, who underrate themselves, was Dr. Perperaps, of Christowell.

He felt that he ought to be more than he was; and his views were exceedingly scientific. But no outlet for them, and no income from them, as well as the recent death of a large ratepayer, from lockjaw—which everybody said he should have stopped—combined to make him yearn for something solid, a fine, slow case, a protracted cure (if any), and the money on the nail; which he therefore must abstain from hitting on the head too speedily.

Throughout the summer, he had reproached himself, and been reproached by his wife, at pensive periods, for letting Dicky Touchwood get well so prematurely. And now he was resolved to avoid

so sad an error, in the new opening offered by the general's bad leg.

"How long will it take?" Mr. Arthur asked him, wistfully. "Not that I have any wish to hurry him, of course. But when will he be able to be moved, with safety?"

"He is an ancient warrior;" the doctor answered warily; "what a privilege it is, to be useful to him! Our country owes everything to these old heroes. And a brother-in-arms, sir, a brother-in-arms——"

"Yes; but how long will he be in my arms? I appreciate the privilege. But I want to know its duration. Because I have to make some arrangements of my own."

"My dear sir, the first physician in England could not tell you. I have scarcely had time for even an elementary diagnosis yet. My impression,—observe that I do not state it as more than a rudimentary impression,—is that the hero of a hundred fights has got suppressed gout in his system. I have tested him gently for arthritic indications; but he strongly objects to being tested."

"I heard him request you, to go to the Devil."

"It was a truly consistent request; and tended to confirm my diagnosis. Gouty patients do that always; forgetting what would happen to themselves, when left behind. But, my dear sir, if you cannot entertain this distinguished visitor, in his sad distress, perhaps I could contrive, without much danger, to have him brought down to my humble abode."

This made the captain look as fierce as Pharaoh; and the doctor facetiously held up his bamboo, to protect himself; and therewith made off.

"What must be, must," thought the other, as he went about his work quite cheerfully; "old Fire and Punk seems very much at home. But he is not the man, to be long upon his back. If it were not for that pompous rogue of a Perperaps, Punk would be up, and off, to-morrow. Wait a bit. Something will arise, within a week, to change the situation."

Something arose within an hour, to change the situation largely. What man, having begun a job, can bear to leave off at three-quarters done? When he has only done a little, it may be in his power to lay his tools down, and go away, muttering to himself,

"Dimidium facti, qui bene cœpit, habet."

But when he has got beyond the half (which comes none the sooner, for the mere beginning) his spirit is up; and his eyes, and

fingers, itch to admire the end of it. And this is the spirit of the mighty artist.

Mr. Arthur, in his little way, was a mighty artist. He could so enwrap himself in his work, as to let everything else slip off; like water, from the plumage of a sweetly oily duck. And he had that fine desire to complete a job well, through want of which, so many men of genius fail. This led him again to that leathery crab-tree, —not at all a pleasant job, to a gardener of high art; because it was a crude, cantankerous subject. But his mind was set upon it, to make good the interruption of the general's disaster, a few days ago.

Now General Punk had been quite terrible, all day; and especially severe to all who did their best to help him. If anybody whispered that, "he would very soon be better," the strongest words were helpless to express his indignation; and he scowled at such atrocity.

Even Rose, to whom he had been courteous, and gentle, in his very worst pangs hitherto, had been obliged, this day, to relieve his tongue, which suffered (in sympathy with his system) from repression, by making some very hasty exits. And Moggy said, without euphemism, he was "nort but an auld divil."

Towards eventide, Miss Arthur, who had enough to do among them, came out for a breath of sweet-languaged air, and the freedom of dwelling with larger things. She had always loved the great moorland view, and the calm ennoblement of the hills, as they drew the sinking light around them, and fostered every farewell glance. She loved to see, how they yielded rank, to the larger lands behind them, and accepted shadow, as they cast their own, in stately grades subordinate.

Our minds must be very much improved, no doubt, from the condition of the old British mind, as it used to work, not more than a hundred years ago. When it wants to describe a thing, the mind makes words, or at any rate, doubles up the old ones into new cocked-hats, and is proud of having found out something fresh. Upon this new windfall, out dash a score of other minds; as a yardful of sparrows gives chase to the one, who has fatally found pie-crust; or as men run after the man, who has hit upon a scampish trick, that pays. The great artists are the men who have taught our eyes to see, and our tongues to speak.

Now this fine sense of abstract beauty should—if it did its business well—suffice to keep the mind, from dwelling on little side-issues of its own. But it is to be observed, in the history of all great artists,

that the largest perception of "the beautiful" never has so sufficed at all. They are full of it, possessed, inspired, radiant; but the expansion of their minds has its little puckers still.

How much more then, is this to be expected, when the mind, inspired by large outlook, is only that of a poor young maiden, left to its own philosophy! There was comfort in the quiet of the hills to her, and a soothing power in the evening light; but still her heart came through her mind; as the round fruit blushes through the glistening of the leaves. And her heart, though not put into words, was full of something, and somebody. For surely, with the better half of mind, there is nothing more grievous, than to think, and think, and have nothing to say about any of it; and the breast, and the hearty parts, that go on very well (if the brain will only let them have their turn) must come up sometimes, and say, that they too have a share in the system.

There had been many things combining (as things generally do) to come down upon Rose, and torment, and vex her, to the furthest boundary of her large, and gentle patience. To a proud, quick-minded, and sensitive girl, it was no small pain, to begin with, to see how her father was behaving towards his unexpected guest. Her father evidently knew full well, why the general was so polite to him,—coldly polite, not even swearing, when the captain was in the room. The latter never stayed longer than to discharge the duties of a host, with a pleasure as stiff as a formal dinner-pary.

Then while he was doing it, the general watched him, with a supercilious gaze, tempered now and then, when his pains came on, with a cross indignant pity.

"What can my father have done?" thought Rose; "What can he have done, to lead to this? He never can have deserved it; but what induces him to put up with it—he who is one of the proudest of mankind?"

Moreover, she was troubled, to the limit of her untried capacity for trouble, by the colonel's conduct. What made him keep away, so entirely from them, and only send inquiries, by some servant, or casual visitor across the moor? And why did her father seem to think that right, when her own sense told her that it was quite wrong?

Over, and above, and perhaps below these thoughts, were many, no less grievous, touching the tenderness of her own cares. Without confession to herself, or any direct discussion of the subject, somehow or other, she had been led to think so highly of young Mr. Westcombe, that he seemed to be the one to solve all this.

But not even once had he been near her, to the utmost of her knowledge, since, under the ash-tree, he had seemed to set his heart, upon her kindly thoughts of him. "No doubt, he despises me, as everybody else does," was the bitter conclusion of her poor young heart; "when people live in mystery, they must expect it. I will be like my father; I will disdain them all; although it is most uncomfortable."

Thinking thus, she looked towards the west; as people out of doors do mainly, when their spirits are in declination. She was standing inside her father's fence; which was hard to climb just there, and gave her strong sense of security. After her recent scare, she feared to wander in the lower ground alone; but here she could see any sign of approach, and might run away home, without being cut off. And the rise of the ground gave her plenty of height, to look over the fence, to the long sweep of moor, and the coving of the combes, that made dark-elbowed shades below them.

Why should the human race, or any other, have two eyes—till their brethren knock out one—unless it is, to see two things at once? By a thousand arguments it may be shown, that the large, benevolent, orthodox, intelligent, and intelligible, law of nature, was—that binocular beings should squint. For the first week of our lives, we all do so; and if wisely let alone, we might retain that gift. But the nurses go against it; and the supple sequacity, which has been nursed into us from our cradles, induces one eye to go after the other, and become shackled to it; in spite of the nose, which was meant to keep them independent. After this what reasonable hope can we have of objectivity?

Without the large outlook, vouchsafed to those mortals, whose twain eyes turn outward, Rose Arthur contrived to see two figures, at the very same moment, though far apart, and quite invisible to each other. One was in a swampy goval, partly lit by sunset, through a gap in the western heights above; and the other was on the hill-front, towards her, rapidly descending.

The one, in the goval, had something, that looked like a long gun, on his shoulder; and he suddenly turned into a shadowy corner, and so far as she could make out, sat down. The other came hastily into the track, where the general had met with his disaster, lately; and then running down to the little spiked gate, looked through, and saw her, and implored to be let in.

"Why should I let you in?" asked Rose, doubtfully feeling for her key.

"Why should you keep me out?" asked the other, "it is very important that I should come in."

"Perhaps it would be rude to keep you out. But this is not the proper way to call; nor the proper time of day, to expect to get in. But you may come in, Mr. Westcombe."

"It is most kind of you to let me in," said Jack, taking care to get inside, before the young lady could change her mind; and then looking at her with steadfast eyes, which expressed an enormous stock of admiration, and a mild determination, to make something of it. "But it would have been a cruel thing, to keep me out. You never do cruel things, do you, Miss Arthur?"

"No, Mr. Westcombe; or if I ever do, I am always sorry afterwards. I am obliged to kill things, very often. What can we do with slugs, and grubs?"

"But if you have pity for them," said Jack; "nasty marauders as they are; how sorry you must be, to trample on your own poor fellow-creatures!"

"But I never do anything of the kind," Rose answered, looking at her little feet to make quite sure; "unless you mean poor Squire Touchwood."

"No, I don't mean him. I wish I did; the more you trample upon him, the better. I mean one a little better, at any rate, than that fellow; though a very humble individual still. If you look at me, you will see my sad meaning."

Rose smiled very sweetly, as she looked at him, and said—"If you have been trampled on, you bear it very well. You show no signs of ill-usage; but rather every symptom of happiness, and self-content. Mr. Westcombe, in what way are you pitiable?"

"Well, perhaps, for the moment, rather less so than usual; because in a certain sweet presence, I am always pervaded with a sudden rush of happiness. It is like coming out of the shade into the light, from the winter to the summer, from a coal mine to a meadow full of bright flowers, and sunshine. Don't laugh now; that is too bad of you. I know that I am not at all poetical—but still——"

"Well, I think you are very poetical indeed. Squire Dicky never said anything, half so fine. He only said two things at all poetical; though he seemed to be trying, very hard, and very brilliantly."

"Oh tell me, what his two flights of poetry were. I never should have dreamed, that he could do so much as that."

"Yes, he did. He told me once, that he would rather sit, and look at me, than see a badger drawn, by his best dog, 'Bob.' And

another time, he said, that the sound of my voice was sweeter than the tinkle of a new tap of pale ale, running into a three quart jug."

"So it is. He was quite right. But how could you resist him, after such a noble flight of poetry? I should have been quite terrified; if I had known he was so clever."

"One must grow capable of more, and more resistance, as one grows older rapidly." This gave the talk a serious turn, and made them look at one another; the result of which was as usual.

Rose thought, how noble, and how simple was his mind; and his heart so soft, and excellent; and his outward form quite good enough, to defend her, and be managed by her. Jack thought how lovely, and how sweet she was; with at least as much mind as any husband wants, and a heart that his own yearned after. Their eyes met gently; and he drew her to him.

"Darling Rose," he said; "how long, am I to be uncertain, what you mean? You are not one of the flimsy kind, who have no heart worth having. Your nature is noble, steadfast, grand."

"There is nothing very grand about me," she said, prolonging the sweet surrender; "if you think that, you will be sadly disappointed."

"But give me the chance of the disappointment. I ask for you, only as you are; according to my own account, not yours. You promised to think kindly of me. Have you done it? Have you been able to do it, sweet Rose?"

"I have done it. And I have made up my mind, that I like you, as well as—as well as you like me."

"Liking has nothing to do with it, Rose. Do you love me, as I love you?"

"You must not be too hard upon me. I have never had this to do before. But I do love you, John, a great deal better than myself."

"Then you will give yourself to me," John Westcombe said; and perceiving that her eyes were bright with tears, as she bowed her head, he laid the head gently upon his shoulder, and kissed away the tears; and then found it essential to kiss the trembling lips as well; because there were symptoms of a happy sob between them. "Now you are mine; for ever mine;" he was whispering, in the most lovely rapture; when a stern voice came, from behind the crab-tree.

"Halloa, sir! What are you doing there?" And the voice was followed by a tall man striding, who took Rose from Jack, as a

bird whips a feather from another bird's nest, and said,—"Go home directly. I will speak to you, by-and-by." Then, to John Westcombe, he spoke disdainfully—

"Sir, I had imagined, that you were a man of honour."

"Don't be so hasty, sir," Jack answered; for he possessed the true basis of all courage—self-command; "I am not ashamed of anything that I have done, sir."

"Of course, you are not. You consider it no harm whatever, to have broken your parole."

"You forget, sir, how the time goes by. I have broken no parole. I pledged myself, for the fishing season; because you allowed me to come up your water. Not that I cared for the fishing, two tails of a gnat; but that I could see your house. When the fishing expired, my bond expired. And the trout in the Christow are beginning to prepare to spawn before very long; as Mr. Short says, who understands them well. And Mr. Short says, that it has been agreed, by all who understand the subject, that the fishing in these upper waters ceases, upon partridge-shooting day. And that was a week ago almost; so that I have taken no advantage, but purposely left it all on your side."

"I am sorry for your sake," said the captain, looking at him, so that Jack's grey eyes went down; "that your honour can be satisfied, with such flimsy stuff as this. To use it as an argument, is an insult to me; or else a disgrace to your own self. Say rather, that you were overcome by youthful haste: and then I will endeavour to respect you again."

This to a young man of Jack's shy pride, was almost too bitter to put up with, even from the father of his Rose. His solid face worked, and his grey eyes flashed, with the strain he was putting upon himself. If he had spoken what was upon his lips, he must have lost his love for ever; so bitter was his thought; and so resolute the nature, which it would have outraged. For it was upon his lips to say—"Who are you, to talk of honour? You, who are obliged to hide yourself, and dare not even meet my father!"

But he thought of Rose, just in good time, and said—"Well, sir, perhaps I have been tempted. But I thought it was fair; and I think so still."

"Two words will show you, that it was not fair," Mr. Arthur answered, in a much kinder tone; "possibly you thought, that your promise had expired; but how was I to know, that you thought so? You were bound to let me know, that you would cast off your

pledge, instead of doing so, without my knowledge, and taking advantage of my ignorance."

"I never thought of doing such a thing as that," said Jack; "it would have been mean, and low, and snobbish. I never dreamed, that any one could judge me so."

"Very likely not. But you see what comes of being your own judge, and jury. Good evening, now! I will ask you for no more promises."

"But it never can be your intention to mean," cried the young man, looking as deplorably as he spoke, "that I am to be ordered off your premises, altogether!"

"Not quite so. Let us rather put it thus—you are not to come, until you are invited. And I shall not invite you; until your father wishes it."

"Very well. You can treat me, as you like, sir. But for all that, I am quite resolved to marry your daughter."

"And I am quite resolved that you shall not; in the present condition of things, young man."

The captain looked sternly at Jack, as he spoke; and Jack looked firmly at the captain. Both having strong wills, neither of them said anything more than, "Good evening!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A WILD-DUCK HUNT.

THE twilight was now in that interesting stage, with the last blush of day fading out of the heavens, when the mystery of the moor is grandest, the whisper of tremulous love most thrilling, and the quack of the mallard most ecstatic. For this is the moment, when that noble bird, (after sleeping the day out, on a breezy pool, or among the deep sedges of a lonely water-course,) with slow flaps, and stretches, get out of his bed, and draws up his red feet tingling. Then he opens the valves of his nostrils, and utters a little sharp snort to his family. With a few strong beats, he is up and away, along the crystal bars of light, and the sprinkle of his rise falls far behind. The flush of his start has set all the others off; and the silvery sound of wings flows back, as the cleft air closes, and the dusk is left behind.

But he, with velocity of instinct, guiding all his race to health and food, himself the head of the rapid arrow high above the ups and

downs of earth, urges his powerful pinions, strains his long neck through the whistling air, and sleeks all the plumage of his breast with speed. Until, in the stagnant scene below him, he espies the little place, he wants to be in,—either a malty-looking barley stubble, or an oasis of fat green ooze, or the glistening gem of a lonely pond, chastely enamelled with fat black slugs. Here he descends, as the stars begin to blink; makes the circuit once, with his family behind him; all peering for the hateful human race. Then spying none of that, flop they breast the water, ploughing up less of it than could be expected, but flinging it largely behind them, as they dash, helter-skelter, through the cataract of their own rapture.

These are general facts; but the very fine family of ducks, now dealt with, conformed very fairly with ancestral usage. Neither was it contrary to experience (the race of man, and gun, being equally abundant) that while they were rollicking in their first delight, a big gun flamed at them, from forth a traitor bush, and five unblemished birds turned their poor toes up; while the rest, without halting to lament, took wing.

"I've gived them pepper," cried the man, who had been doing it: "never made a finer shot in all my life. But it don't seem so easy to come at 'em, as I thought. Shall have to get wet up to my middle, I'm afeared."

This was the man, whom Rose had seen afar, following the seam down the hill-front. And now he stood gazing at the dusky pool, begirt with peaty swamp, and sedge, which the little moorland rills had made. There were his victims, far out of reach, and not to be pelted to the other side with stones, even if stones had been at hand; neither was there any wind, to drive them ashore. He doubted for a moment, whether he should leave them so, and return in the morning, with a dog to fetch them out. But his home was some miles away; and he determined, at any rate to have a try for it. "Dare say, it ain't so very deep after all," he muttered to himself contemptuously; "I'll pull off my togs, and go in for 'em."

Raiment was not very plentiful with him; so he carefully laid what would spoil, upon a rock; then he drew the stout ramrod from his gun, to probe the depth before him, and stepped in bravely. At first, the swamp was shallow, scarcely taking him knee-deep; and beginning to laugh at his own misgivings, he waded with his ramrod swinging. Then suddenly, down he went, over head and ears, not in clear water, but in black quagmire, floundering, and flapping, like a fly in beer and treacle. His mouth was filled with sludge, and his eyes dabbed up with slough-crust; and his arms

could scarcely move, among the clog, and clam, they battled with. The harder he fought, the worse he fared; he could not even tell what way to strike for; everything turned black above him, and his breath went into gurgles.

But just as he was disappearing softly, with only his grey hair left behind, a stout crook of ground ash came into his woollen shirt, and his body was hauled out. John Westcombe, on his way to fetch the pony, had heard the gunshot, and seen the distant flash, and set off as hard as his legs would go, to catch the poacher on his father's beat. He knew the spot well; for it was the very one, to which he had followed another flight of ducks, when he parted from the general on the moor; and he was just in time to rush into the swamp, and keeping on the brink of peat, haul out the poor fellow, at his last gasp. Strong as he was, and self-possessed, Jack had as much as he could do, to fetch out his burden through the inky slush, and then through the tangle of the swampy margin, without drowning him; if indeed that still remained to do. But the young man, as soon as he got a firm grasp, lifted his load; and the black slime from it trickled among the light green water-grass.

"You must do your very best to breathe," said Jack, who had never read directions to revive drowned persons; "let me wash the dirt off first; and then you won't have to swallow it. You will get on very nicely, if you don't think about it. I heard him breathe! Now try again, sir; and you shall have a doctor, if you go on well."

The poor man could not even lift his chest against it; though the helpless droop of his neck showed plainly, that he knew what he was threatened with. "Very well," said Jack, who was quick of observation, "if you will come round, you shall not have him. I will see to you myself; and I am not a doctor."

What sweeter speech can be made to any man, whose spirit is hovering, just conscious of the horrors, it may prefer to leave behind?

With a spirit of recovery, this man drew breath; his nostrils quivered with consolation, and the numb little spring of his heart began to give a weak jog, to go on again. Young Westcombe did to him exactly, what he thought he himself would have wanted, in the like condition; and, by-and-by, the man sat up, and sneezed, and appeared to seek about for refreshment. "Spirits have I none," said Jack; "but if you could manage a little drop of old Madeira, diluted largely—or to speak more plainly, mixed with good spring-water——"

"Had too much water a'ready," said the man; "and Mydeary wine never goeth well with it."

"Then have it, as it is," advised John Westcombe. The man took his advice, and left a rueful hollow in the shooting-flask, for Jack to go home upon, without a bit of dinner.

"That have done me real good. Never thought to taste no more of such. I knows the very farm where that was growed."

Westcombe was surprised at this, and thought that the poor man's wits were still abroad. But looking at him keenly, in the clear mellow light of the harvest moon, which had now risen grandly, he perceived, on his bare breast and arms, the tokens of a wandering, outlandish life. There was a deep tattooing, in various tints; a heart done in red, where the weak heart beat below; and a chain of little charms, clotted in a lump with mire.

"Let me get my togs on," said the man, looking up at him; "my legs feels, as if they were somebody else's. I must go, and have a wash first. You may trust me, not to run away, sir."

"I never thought of your running away. Why should you want to run away, my friend? Do you suppose, that I want to apprehend you?"

"Bah! I know, well enough, what you swells be," said the other, refusing Jack's hand to help him up, although his legs were shaking, and his teeth upon the chatter; "you come to nab me, and nab me you have; and a good job for me, in one way. Think, I don't know you, Squire Westcombe? But I won't make no resistance, sir, after what you have done to me."

"I tell you, my friend, that you must be a fool, if you think that I want to punish you. My father never makes a fuss about the wild-ducks. My father is the best man in all the world. And I quite agree with him, in that. Why, even if I had caught you netting grouse, or partridges; I should never take advantage of you, in this condition. You shall not only go home, as you please, but you shall take your ducks with you, if I can get them. You are a plucky fellow, and you deserve them; and I will not even ask you, what your name is. Now, get your clothes on, and finish up the wine; which you understand, better than I do. If you had been worthy to be called a poacher, you would have known how to get those ducks out."

"Well, sir," said the man, as he went to wash and dress himself; "it is the first time I have tried here. Though I never would have told you so, if you had persecuted."

John Westcombe very easily laid hand upon the wild-ducks, by

going round the pool, and wading in, from the opposite bank, where the ground was firm enough. Then he brought them back, and gave them to the gunner, who expected to see him march off with them.

"You have done me a real good turn;" he said, thinking more of this kindness, so far as could be judged, than of Westcombe's gallant act in saving him; "and very few now ever does me a good turn. If it lies in my power, sir—and I believe it do—you shall have a good return for it. Mean to tell me, that you don't know, who I be?"

"I give you my word," answered Jack, with a smile, "that you may be the man in the moon, for all I know. Only, I don't suppose he is such a good shot."

This compliment pleased the man, almost as much as anything; and his surly manner, which had long been yielding, gave way altogether; as he sat upon a big lump of granite, and spoke with a sad deep tone.

"I'll tell you, who I am, Squire Westcombe, then. My name is 'Gruff Howell,' they call me mostly; and I keep the old inn, by the mines, the *Raven*. I have often seen you pass, sir, both on horse-back, and afoot; and the moor-men told me who you was. Happen to be a dinner-party, ordered to our house, next Friday, of some sharp blades, not too partiklar, how their victuals come, so long as they be good. They made a great cue about ducks; there must be two ducks to each end of the table, and Captain Lark's marrowfats, to go with them. Well, sir, we put up the ducks with barley-meal, and settled the very day to stick them, when down come old Reynard, and his vixen, from the tor, with a starving lot of little ones waiting for them; and away goes our four fat ducks, in a winking. I heard a tremendous quack-quack, in the night, and out of bed I jumped, with this here gun; but I might as well have fired at the moon, or the comet. So I made up my mind to get some wild-ducks instead; for they would set the house on fire, if I crossed them; and the valleys led me on, till I got here."

"You must have got a capital gun," said Jack; "to kill these five ducks so clean, at forty yards. It is more than any gun of ours would do."

"I picked her up in Spain, sir; she is of Spanish make. She will put a shot through a slate, at fifty yards, sir; and that is more than any English gun will do."

"But, when were you in Spain? You are shivering, you are cold. You have been in the tropics, I dare say, too. You are still wet underneath. If you stand about like this, the night-air from the

hills will pretty nearly make an end of you. Come along; stir up; I will help you homeward."

Gruff Howell was getting very stiff by this time; as a man of three score years and ten deserved to be, after going through so much of long walking, and waiting, with his eyes upon the stretch, and then falling into mire, and being dragged out, and spread to dry by moonlight.

"Sir, you are wonderfully good," he said; "but I can get home well enough; or sleep in a furze-bush, this fine weather. In the old days, I have had many a worse bed, and got up sprightly in the morning. I have been through more, than ever you could have stood, sir; strong as you are, but not brought up to it."

"I dare say. But you are not very young now. And I have often heard my father say, that men, who have been in hot climates long, are upset altogether by the night-air, on these hills. I shall see you on your road, till I am sure that you are safe. How far is it to the *Raven?* I should say, at a guess, at least five miles."

"Better than that, sir; and all rough walking. But the moon is good, and I know my way. You have got many miles to go home to-night; and you are wet to the skin, and young men gets consumption. Not another step shall you come, with me: as if I was an old woman gone astray. And to tell you the truth, 'twould do me more harm than good, and stop me from doing any good to you. There is a pair of sharp eyes aspying on me always. But I would like dearly, to have a talk with you; and might be important to you to hear it. When could you make it handiest, to give me a meeting somewhere? Somewhere out upon the moor, I mean."

"Any day, and any time you like," Jack answered; "to-morrow, if it suits you; or perhaps the day after. I want to go to Tavistock to-morrow."

"Well, sir, let me think. To-day is Wednesday. Friday, my dinner is to be, or supper, or whatever they may call it. Would Saturday suit you, to meet me somewhere?"

"Yes, as well as any day; or best of all, I might say; because I am coming towards you that day, for a quiet little bit of shooting. I am coming all alone, and will call upon you, if you like, at your own place, the *Raven*. Or if you like it better, I will meet you somewhere."

"It would never do, for you to come near our house, sir; or at least not to stop there, for any time of talk. But you know the Island Rocks, of course. Would your shooting bring you round that way, about three, or four o'clock, on Saturday?"

"Yes, I might easily manage it so. I am very fond of that wild place. There are widgeon, or teal there, very often. But it is a long way from your house. Bring your Spanish cannon, Howell."

"That I will, sir, with your leave; for I might want her, for self-defence. It is a long way from our place, surely; but so much the better for that, to my thinking. The men as comes to our place now, if they was to see me talking to you, would take me by the scruff of the neck, and pitch me down the old mine-shaft, at road-end. But the crest of the hill is no place for talking. Good-bye, sir, till Saturday."

CHAPTER XL.

THE NOBLEST MAN.

"I CALL it too bad of them all, Uncle John," said Julia Touchwood, that same day, "to run away, and leave us *tête-à-tête*, like this. If they go on so, I shall run away to-morrow, and have an intellectual combat with poor Dicky; or go, and nurse the general—a dangerous, but interesting task; because he will want to swear so dreadfully, yet dare not, in my presence; and I shall drive him to the very verge of suppressed insanity, by sweet ministrations, of the most irksome order. Ah, it would be capital fun! His face is such a study; when his lips are burning for a good round something, and his eyes rolling sadly, at the fair sex in the room."

"Why don't you marry him, my dear?" asked Colonel Westcombe; "you might always enjoy that fine sight then."

"Alas no, dear uncle! Where is your knowledge of mankind? How lavishly, how rapturously, would he swear before his wife; and at her too, before three days were over!"

"Julia, in spite of all your attractions, you will have to put up with an old man, I do believe. Your turn of mind is too sarcastic, too uncharitable, for young men to be pleased with you. They like something softer, something sweeter-natured, something more confiding, and simple, and——"

"And sawny. Very well; they may like what they please—somebody with as much brains as themselves. I shall not break my heart for them, Uncle John. If the worst comes to the worst, I shall have old Mr. Short; I can do that, by holding up my finger any day. He is the only one I get the worst of; when it comes to a chaffing-match. And after all, matrimony comes to that. I have

no faith in love, or spoony doings, or the heart. The heart is corrupt, and desperately wicked; according to inspired authority. Then what is the good of it? I don't want it; I would rather have a man, with mind, and body, that I must look up to, than a lot of stupid hearts. If Mr. Short's head was at the top of his hat, I would have him to-morrow; to spite every one, and to rout out that spiteful old Aggett, who insulted me. Don't suppose that I am excited, Uncle John; I am not; I never am; and I never mean to be. Now you can tell me, what you think."

"Well, my dear," said Colonel Westcombe, after looking about a bit, and admiring Julia's flashing eyes, which seemed almost to light up the room, where they sat in the twilight, with the cloth removed; "You must remember that I am quite old-fashioned; that I never have been, what is called a 'ladies' man,' nor even accustomed to smart society; because I was poor; and poor people are stupid—as to wordly views, at least. You may be quite right, as among rich people, in describing marriage as a 'chaffing-match;' and, if so, it is desirable, of course, that the husband should be the best hand at it; so that he may be looked up to. But my view of the question is widely different. I will not trouble you with it."

"Why not, Uncle John?" She spoke in a soft low voice, and did not look at him; for tears were lurking in her proud bright eyes.

"Because, my dear, it would do no good. Your nature in many ways is noble, Julia; but too fiery, and not at all submissive. If you ever marry, as I heartily hope that you will do—and you have years yet, to consider it—you ought to have some one, as quick of mind as you are; but possessing far more self-command."

"I get it from my mother. I can't help it. I know that I am peppery, and contemptuous. But, oh, Uncle John, how I could adore a man like you, for instance!"

"My dear, you may find a thousand men, of far finer character, than mine ever was; and I find myself growing sadly selfish now. I heartily hope, that you may find one, to suit you, appreciate you, and and—well I will say it—peg you down; as anybody must, to live happily with you. Mind, I only mean, at first. After that, you would go on well."

"Thank you, Uncle John, for that reprieve. How my self-knowledge is enlarged! If it ever comes to pass, and I am bullied horribly, I shall cry out, on the funeral pyre, 'O Uncle John!' with a loud voice thrice; as the Eastern king did, with the torches under him. And then, will you come, and unbind me?"

"My dear, I do not, at the present moment, recall the situation, to which you refer. I suppose it is in the *Arabian Nights*. And that reminds me of story-telling. Your mind is a little excited, for the moment; and I have said harsh things to you. Instead of going up, and dwelling upon them, would you like to hear me tell the story, for which you have so often begged, of the noblest man I ever knew?"

"Oh, if you will only tell me that—and it is the very time for it. If he only underwent reproach like me?"

"That he did, Julia. And without deserving it. To screen another from rebuke, and shame. It was one of the saddest things I ever knew; and I have met with many sad ones. But you must allow me not to mention names, or at any rate only Christian names: for reasons, which—which are binding still. And you must not speak of it lightly; because it would pain me greatly, if you did so."

"Much as I may want pegging down, Uncle John; I should want it still more, if I could do such a thing. Sit in this comfortable chair, and then begin."

"No, I will sit just where I am. Whenever I go back to those old times, I am ashamed of my present luxury. But come you, and rest here, my dear child; because my voice is not always clear. Now, are you ready? Then please not to interrupt me, because it throws out my memory; and I have not told that story, for a long time now.

"After the battle of Talavera, which was a very hard-fought field, and by no means decisive, the British army, and I may say the whole Peninsular cause, was in the greatest jeopardy, for several days. Our force was small; we had lost a great many of our very best troops, in the two days of combat; we had no clear knowledge of the position, strength, or intentions of the enemy; we could not trust the Spanish general, to act in concert with us, or even to keep us informed of his movements; the French were in far superior force, both in front, and in our rear; we were hemmed in the narrow valley of the Tagus, between a rapid river, and trackless mountains; worst of all perhaps, or at any rate most depressing, we could count one another's bones with famine. For an entire month, we did not receive so much as ten full rations. The Spaniards did the feeding, and left us to do the fighting. Their men were like dripping-pans; ours like gridirons. You may suppose, what our condition was, when I tell you, my dear Julia, that the offal of a goat, rank, leathery, reeking, would sell for as much as my best sheep is worth; and that I have seen dainty young officers, who would turn up their noses at

cold meat in England, chase the gaunt swine in the forest, and devour the flesh, with the bristles on, raw, and quivering. Spanish ham raw, and without any garlic—and the Spaniards, whose place it was to supply us, even accused us of theft for this !

"What with anxiety, weariness, and famine, we were all very miserable, as you may suppose ; many of our best friends lay dead, or wounded—I myself had lost a beloved schoolfellow, as brave a young fellow as ever breathed, in that terrible charge of the 23rd —; we expected the French to fall upon us, in overwhelming numbers ; and as yet, we had not that implicit confidence in our great commander, then Sir Arthur Wellesley, which afterwards made us so irresistible. The wisest of us thought, that the whole scheme of the campaign was wrong (as is now confessed freely), enforced upon our general, perhaps by the politics of the day. While the more foolish of us (who were a thousand times as many, naturally) were convinced, by starvation, that the object of the patriotic Spaniards was, to destroy us also. They could not bear to see us upon their land ; although we were there to defend it. And the more of us died—instead of themselves—the better they enjoyed it.

"I may be narrow-minded, and an unfair witness ; but nine out of ten of us say the same. Many a time we longed for a good charge, into the centre of the Spanish army ; if it deserved to be called an army. But we got to respect the French, and like them ; they are not hidalgoes, but gentlemen ; and every bit as brave as our own fellows. If they had been led, as well as we were, with one head present over them, instead of a lot of jealous marshals, countermarching one another, we should have left our bones behind in 1809 : for we were not many, and the few we had were starved.

"However, I am rambling into big questions, instead of going through with my little one. When we retired, after Talavera, leaving our sick and wounded there, to the care of the Spaniards, who deserted them ; nothing but a bold stroke on the part of our commander, and the remissness of Napoleon's puppet-king, preserved us. Sir Arthur crossed the Tagus, just in time, by the bridge of Arzobispo ; and then it became of vital import to seize the bridge of Almaraz, lower down ; by which our retreat might be intercepted. To make sure of this momentous point, a force of light cavalry was sent in advance, with all possible despatch. And the first, to arrive at the bridge, were the same Hussars, of whom I spoke before ; most dashing, impetuous, reckless fellows.

"The night was very sultry, and unusually dark, darker than I have ever known a summer night in England ; and I suppose that

is quite natural. We, the main body of the army, were eight, or ten miles, higher up the river, labouring along with the lame-horsed guns, and places where no horse could drag them up. Then the black night fell upon us; and we boiled our empty kettles. Men, who have marched far, with nothing in their stomachs, fall into a jog-trot sort of resignation, a weary trust in Providence, that having had the bad side, they ought to find the good one turning up. I remember the night quite well, because I had never been so lame in all my life; and I went down to the Tagus, where a little brook ran in, from a place they call the 'Meza d'Ibor;' and though I could not spare the time to bathe, because somebody else would have gobbled up my supper, I soaked my hot feet in the cool mountain water, and from limping, was able to jump again. For all of us, officers as well as men, had taken a strong pull at the guns that day.

"I assure you that we were more full of fatigue, than of anything else, to sleep upon; for a quarter of a pound of unground wheat was all the bread we had for supper; and the meat was an ounce of goat's flesh. We were thankful, we enjoyed it, and we tried to spare some, for our friends with weaker appetites, who had taken the fever, or been wounded. But there was a heavy feeling in the air around us; and the night, that came over, seemed to lie upon our bodies, instead of drawing round us, like a curtain.

"The insects were enough to eat us up; the heavier the air is, the harder they do labour. There is a fearful creature there, with a saw in his head, like a prawn's; and in his tail, a gimblet, with a fir-cone structure to it. When a weary man is fast asleep, this fellow takes his stand, in some sensitive part of the system, where he can find a little eminence of the surface, not far from an equal depression. Then he spreads his legs, like a painter's trestle, and works his head-saw through the hill before him, while he screws the cutting worm of his tail-gimblet, into the valley behind him. And the worst of it is, that you never can catch him.

"In spite of all our weariness, these, and other plagues, allowed us scarcely a good wink of sleep; and we distinctly heard trumpets, miles away, and the sound of small arms, carried to us, by the peculiar condition of the night, and the formation of the hills around us. We were puzzled; for we thought that the French could not be there; but none could ever say where the Spaniards might be; for their great delight was, to keep us in the dark about it.

"We marched very slowly, on the following day, down the left bank of the Tagus; the weather being most oppressive, the track

very difficult, and our horses broken down. But when we arrived, on the evening after that, opposite the boat-bridge at Almaraz (which had been so important to us), we saw a very sad, and moving scene, which will never quit my memory. In a bend of the river, where the setting sun threw shadows on the yellow ground it had scorched up, a firing-party was taking position; and before them stood a British officer.

"I had never seen a thing of that kind yet; neither had those around me; but we knew, as if by instinct, what it was, and we drew aside, and trembled. The verdict of court-martial was being read aloud, and we heard the words—'cowardice, and treachery, in the presence of the enemy;' and the sentence—'death.'

"There stood a group of officers, illustrious now throughout Europe, as long as any history shall last; the commander-in-chief, looking stern as the rocks; and a part of the celebrated Light Division, drawn up like a wall, and as mute, and still. But the faces of many of the men were working; for they loved the man they were to slay.

"He stood calmly looking at them, as firm as I am now, and a great deal firmer; and he even seemed to smile, at such a fuss about his life. He was asked, if he had anything to say, and he said—'Nothing.' And then with a stately step he went, and took his place, where the distance had been measured, and stood with his hands at his side, his heels together, and his broad chest expanded, for the bullets. I saw him, with the sunset on his face, and knew him—the man who had saved my life—the bravest man I had ever met with.

"The guns were levelled at him, he was opening his lips to say 'Fire!' as he had claimed the right to do,—when, swifter than a flash of steel, a man leaped before the muzzles, turned round, and cried—'Shoot me, shoot me! I did it all. He knew nothing of it. Shoot me; if you must shoot any one.'

"It was the mere click of a trigger, that both of them were not shot together. The general held his hand up; the men dropped their muskets; the two, in such peril, stood side by side, each challenging the death-shot. In a moment, it was known that they were brothers, and a buzz of wonder broke the awful silence. Before we could see any more of them, they were both under guard, by Sir Arthur's orders, for the further consideration of their case.

"Now the story is a strange one; yet not to be doubted, in the face of all the evidence. These two brothers were of very good birth, and a family well-known in England. Well-known, not only

for their property, and lineage, but also for their strong peculiarities. It was said, that they never thought, as other people thought; and never even acted upon what they thought, as others would have done, who thought so. And this seems to have shown itself, in the actions of these two, which I have not been able at all to understand, up to the present moment. And my good friend, General Punk—though he will not confess it—is no wiser.

"However, I can tell you, that these two brothers, Philip, and Lewis, were in the same regiment of Hussars, attached to the Light Division, of which you have heard me speak before. A fashionable, and a proud regiment it was, famous for discipline, dash, and daring. Lewis, the younger brother, had been with it some time, and was exceedingly popular, both with the men and his brother-officers, though considered rather odd, and romantic in his views He was given to roving among the woods, whenever he could get the opportunity, and was always collecting plants and mosses; which of course he had to leave behind him. His colonel had called him to order, once or twice, for habits rather unsoldierlike; but the knowledge of the country, which he obtained, had more than once proved useful; he brought many welcome contributions to the mess, such as fish, fruit, truffles, &c.; and above all there was no calmer head, no stronger hand, no bolder heart than his, in the charge, the surprise, or the rally.

"The elder brother, Philip, had only joined quite lately, exchanging from some other regiment: and there had not been time, to know much about him yet; except that he was very different from his brother Lewis, in everything, except appearance. In person, the brothers resembled one another, like twins; though I believe, there were three or four years between them. But Lewis had been exposed to climate, and hardship; while his brother, the viscount—for he was that by courtesy—had been living at home, in luxury. But they were not like twins, in anything, except the outward form, I do believe. For instance, there was no especial love between them; they avoided one another, when they could well do so; and seemed to have widely different tastes.

"All this came out afterwards, as you must know; for no especial heed of them was taken, with so many great events around us. Neither would we have heard that much about them, except for the extraordinary upshot of the case. We had plenty of young noblemen, and heirs to titles, headed off, like poppies, when the French struck straight. But the oddness of this thing, and the contradiction of opinion, made us notice it. And I tell you, Julia, that

I was only too glad, to have been out of the way when it happened; because I should not have known what to say, if they had called upon me for evidence.

"The night had been very dark; all agreed to that; and we had found it so, a few leagues higher up the river. A very close, and heavy cloud, fell over all the land; without any mist or dew (which help to carry light, they say), and without a flash of lightning, to enliven it. Those Hussars, or rather a detachment of them, not more than a hundred and fifty sabres, under urgent orders of despatch, rode into the black pine-wood, between the mountains and the river-bank. I was told by one of them (quite a boy, who died gallantly in action at the Coa, next year) that they could hardly see their hands, before their faces, in the depth of that pitchy pine-wood; and but for that officer, who seemed to know every stick of it, they never could have found their way to the rickety boat-bridge. There they dismounted, sent fifty of their number across, saw to their horses, and sat down, by the black streak of the river, to their scanty, hot, dry rations.

"Now, hereupon hangs the whole gist of the question, so far as there can be any question, where a man not only pleads guilty, but is the absolute witness against himself. Did the younger brother, Lewis—who was the senior officer, you must understand, and in command of the detachment, with his elder brother under him—did he cross the boat-bridge, as he should have done—for the danger was upon the other side, if any—or did he, as he himself declared, send his brother across, and remain with the main body? The night was so dark, and the brothers so alike, in figure, stature, dress, walk, and gesture, that the story must be left between themselves.

"That night, the most marvellous disgrace that ever befell a fine regiment, befell those Hussars. They were terrified, where no fear was; they were stricken with a panic, they were scared out of their lives, or rather of their wits; for they never thought twice of their lives in the matter, I do believe. At any rate, off they went, helter-skelter, with what the French call a *sauve qui peut*, every man jumping on the first horse he could catch, and tearing away, as if the devil tore behind him.

"In the morning, the bridge was wide open for the French, and the still more important ford below; and if they only had Napoleon with them, or even Soult unthwarted, not a British soldier, who fought at Talavera, would have told the tale, except in a French prison. The two best troops of the best British horse, that ever struck

stirrup, or drew sabre, were leagues away on the road to Deleytoza, and came back at noonday; with even their horses hanging their tails, like a dog to be thrashed.

"It is said, that in the blackest hour of that black night, when these brave men lay sleeping—except the outpost across the river—sleeping the heavy sleep of men deadly weary, and with nothing on their stomachs to make them dream,—a fear came through the air around them, a shudder, without voice or sound, a terror of the spirit, and a trembling of the flesh.

"All at once, it seized them, asleep or waking, lying on their backs, or sitting up against a tree, thanking the Lord for being still alive, or swearing at the insects, for knowing it; whatever they were doing, who ever they were, howsoever they strove to man themselves,—a black fear came into the marrow of their hearts; man breathed it into man, horse into horse; and not one of them stayed there, to cough, or to snort.

"Their friends, across the river, took the panic at a back-stroke. Like frogs on the leap, they sprang over the bridge, caught their horses, and clung to their necks, while they spurred them, anyhow, anywhere, anyway, to be out of that black devilish wood. Three, or four, were killed against the branches; the others caught the main lot, and added to their terror. Bridles were not dreamed of, all was spur, and lie-along, and horses' throats were knocked up by the heels of horses. 'The devil take the hindmost' was the only cue, among as brave a lot of men, as ever feared the Lord.

"One man alone remained behind; an officer, who had not shared the panic, but could no more stop it, in the dark, than you or I could make a rabid dog sit up, and beg. This was the officer, who had crossed the river; that is admitted beyond all doubt, and shown by a curious circumstance, which I shall remember by and by, perhaps. The brother in command (the senior in the regiment, though the younger by birth) should have certainly done this; because that was the side where the attack would be. However it appears, from his own statement, that the elder brother, Philip, was the brave one. The younger brother was the cause of all the shame; which was clearly shown to have begun with the officer, who remained in command, on our own side of the Tagus.

"The rest of the story, my dear Julia, goes into a very few words; and I am sure, I owe you many thanks, for having listened to so long a tale, with so much patience. Our great commander, after sifting all the facts, so far as the hurry of the time permitted, referred the matter home; for the sentence of court-martial, confirmed by

himself, could not be set aside lightly. Home-influence was brought to bear, no doubt; for the father of the two young men stood high with the government, and had a special hold, it was said, upon His Royal Highness. How that may have been, I cannot say; but such things never seem to fail of their due weight. The upshot of it was that the 'Headlong Hussars,' (as we called them, until they redeemed their disgrace, by dying, almost to a man, in battle) lost both the officers of that great night-scare. The younger was cashiered; and the elder threw up his commission, with applause, having acted nobly, and saved his poor brother, at the risk of his own life."

"But, Uncle John," cried Julia Touchwood, who had listened most attentively to that long story; "you know best, of course, because you were there, and saw it all; which makes all the difference; but for my part I see nothing wonderfully noble, in a man jumping suddenly before a lot of guns, to save his own brother from their contents. Why, I would have done as much as that, for Dicky. You may think I am boasting; and perhaps I am. But I feel sure, that I could do that much."

"So do I. I know you would," Colonel Westcombe answered quietly; "in moments of excitement, we think nothing of our lives. The noble action was not that. The nobility was, that a nobleman should take upon himself, for the sake of a younger brother, the shame of arrant cowardice, and treachery—for that was charged, and supposed to be proven—the ruin to his life, the contempt for ever, the scorn of his regiment, his relatives, and country. He was a man of the world; he knew it; he knew that he would blast all his young life to the root; yet he faced it all—to save his brother."

"I should like to know something, as to what he had been;" said the sceptical Julia, as if to herself; "I mean, before he went out to Spain. Whether he had shown himself so very noble then; or whether he had been loose, and slippery. You knew, what his brother was; but nothing about him."

"But my dear child, these were the facts, according to his own confession of them. It is a maxim of law, which I have heard at petty sessions——"

"I don't care that," she answered, snapping her long, strong, tapering forefinger—"for the maxims of the laws, even of the Medes and Persians; which were the only laws worth having, because even bribery could not change them. My plan is, to judge people, by their nature; in accordance with their acts, and their characters, and looks. And I say that the man, who had proved himself

thoroughly brave, in a thousand perils, could not have run away, could never have given the shameful order to run away, and would have stuck to the bridge of boats for ever; till Spanish starvation made him drop between them."

"But suppose that he was bribed, my dear; or had some other crooked motive. Something of the sort seemed to be implied, in some side words, or——"

"Uncle John, I am quite ashamed of you. A man who saved your life, and stood to be shot at, as well as even you could do!"

"Well, it is mean, shabby, low, and nasty of my mind, to be crossed with such vile ideas. And it never could have happened to me, but for the quantity of the world, that I have seen."

CHAPTER XLI.

DULY EXECUTED.

At this very time, there was going on in London that sad, but inevitable work of nature, the death of an old, and once powerful man. A breath of great heat had gone into the town, crossing the Thames from light-soiled hills, and commons, where fern and furze were dead with fire. Great heat, and great cold, especially the latter, have to repeat their onset long, before they get into those brick and stone bowels; but once let them get in, and they have their revenge. There are forests, that no brief storm can enter. The still mass of air within them walls out momentary impact; but when it once yields to persistent pressure, the fury of the baffled wind is greater, than on the open plains outside. So now, in this great September heat, London was a living furnace. Mrs. Giblets, and her daughter Mary, accustomed to fine country air, and even Mr. and Mrs. Snacks, and baby Snacks, lay prostrate.

At the great house, within the old ivied walls, a special batch of hot air settled down; so that the crusty bricks were like a baker's, the windows like oven-doors, the grass-plots cracked as wide as a frog-jump, and the elms crisped off, with leaves as brown as the wares of a London greengrocer. The people inside, with true urban wisdom, threw all the windows open, thus sucking in (to cool themselves) air thirty degrees hotter than that of the house. So that the big house, which might have stood a siege of a week's heat, with the port-holes down, was as hot, in a day, as the heat outside.

When this had gone on for three days, with a blazing sun, and hazy nights, that nursed the sun's work, till he came back; when every slate was like a fire-tile, and every window-sill a hearth-stone, and an egg might reasonably have been roasted on the wood-work of the frames; it happened that the last room in the house, that contained any cool air, lost it. This was the largest room of all, the ball-room of the younger days, now made into two, by a great black screen, for the sick lord to sit, and to sleep in. The door, a double one, with heavy purple hangings, faced the head of the broad old staircase, which was made of chestnut wood, with steps of only two-inch rise; for the ancestors of our present builders considered ladies' ankles, and their lovers' tightened knees.

Now, in the depth of this hot dark night, when the doors were thrown open, with a needless weight to stop them, and not even a window-blind had the life to rustle, at the head of the stairs, a loud voice cried—"Lewis, Lewis, my son Lewis!"

The deep hollow sound, and the loneliness of it, frightened every weltering heart at first; and they whispered in the darkness—"it is no concern of mine." But the housekeeper, Mrs. Tubbs, to set a good example, ordered back her trembles, and came out. She was dressed very nicely—as she always liked to be—and had not even put her night-cap on, for bed was the hottest place of all (she said), but was dozing in a stamped leather chair, and dreaming, in her chintz "pegnor," of the absent Captain Tubbs. With as little fear as she could manage, this brave woman stole to the foot of the main staircase, by the light of the night-lamp burning in the hall. At the head of the stairs, she beheld a gaunt figure, wrapped in a blue silk dressing gown, standing between two white marble statucttes. The effigies were of two boys, young boys: and the dying father, who had lost them both, was come to spend his last minutes there. The weak breath of his end was nigh; but his voice was clear, and his mind was keen, as in days of noblest arrogance. In the shadow of the images, he spread one withered hand to either, and lamented.

"One, through wild indulgence, gone; and one, through savage tyranny! Is there any one faithful to me? How can I expect it?"

Then he called, with the pain of great wrong in his heart—"Lewis, Lewis, my son Lewis! If I could see you, before I die!"

Meanwhile Mrs. Tubbs (who was growing rather stout, from dining every Sunday with her dear friend, Mrs. Snacks) was working her way up the big staircase; for his lordship's despair of any loyalty had touched her, as well as the sadness—so she told

the undertaker—"of him having two himages of boys, not grown into any brecches yet; when he might have had two live officers, with as much gold lace as a footman; if it hadn't been for his own wickedness." Being a woman, she forgot every bit of his wickedness now, in his wretchedness.

"My lord," she said, approaching very carefully, because of the shadows, and of his condition; "you were asking for some one faithful to you. I have always been that; and have always borne the highest possible character, for honesty, integrity, industry, high principle, combined with an eagerness to oblige——"

"Then oblige me, by holding your tongue. Oh, Tubbs! Of course it is Tubbs. Tubbs, come in here."

"Your lordship looks very ill indeed," observed the lady, entering the large room, with some fear—for a pair of wax candles were but timid ghosts of light—"let me put on my bonnet, my lord,—I have no fear,—and run for Sir John, this moment."

"No, Tubbs; Sir John can do me no more good, nor harm. Thanks to the fishmonger, I am dying. He sent no ice. It was Gaston's place to see to it. He bribed him not to send it; I am quite sure of that. For he heard Sir John say, that heat would kill me. But I will floor him yet; if he will only keep away. Where is he? Does he know, that I am up and moving? He generally sticks to me, as tight as any horse-leech."

"He must have heard your lordship's call; but you know what Mr. Gaston is, in a thunderstorm. And though I have not heard thunder yet, I saw a bright flash of lightning, just before your lordship shouted." Even as she spoke, a pale blue current flickered through the gloomy room.

"I did not call. I was talking to myself. Lightning again! If it would only last for two hours, I would fight off death."

Mrs. Tubbs started; for the flash was much nearer, and a long peal of thunder rumbled through the house. "That will drive him into the coal-cellar," she said; "he has no fear of God, or of Satan; but he can't abide a thunderstorm."

The old man trembling, (not with fear, but weakness,) went to the great coved window, facing to the south-east, whence the tempest was approaching. "The curtains are too heavy; draw them back; that I may see the night."

Following his steps, and order, the housekeeper drew the hangings back; but of the night there was nothing to be seen, except black distance. Then there came a lifting flash, that showed St. Paul's, and the two shot-towers, a far away flash upon the Kentish hills.

"Gaston is a coward," said the earl, as he fell into a chair, and wiped his forehead; "the storm is twenty miles away as yet. Tubbs, are you afraid of summer lightning?"

"Not I, my lord. In the very worst of weather, I feels myself under the hand of the Lord. Mr. Gaston, you know, has been struck by lightning; and a burnt child——"

"Tubbs, you shall have a thousand pounds, if you fetch me a lawyer, while I sit here alive. Give me my elixir first. Double quantity—all in the bottle. When the cold comes, after the storm, I shall die."

As the housekeeper hurried down the stairs, she peeped into Mr. Gaston's room, which commanded the approach to the old earl's quarters, as well as a general survey of the basement. The red-faced man was not there; he had fled to the cellarage, under the pantries and kitchen, as the surest refuge from the storm. Mrs. Tubbs turned her nose up; for she hated that man, if possible, more than she feared him; and then, with feminine insolence, she took his best umbrella from the stand, and quitted the premises by the little door, where poor Mrs. Snacks had been so unwell.

There was no rain yet; but flips of reflected lightning, here there and everywhere, shone upon the roadway, or flickered at the corner, or flitted behind some big tree, or black house. Mrs. Tubbs went on bravely; of all the works of the Lord, she feared man only, finding him to be the only bad one. She said this to herself, to make the best of things—because there were no men about, but plenty of the higher works of Providence—as she hastened towards "Amalgamation Villa," the hospitable abode of Mr. Snacks.

That gentleman was up, and wide awake, carefully conning share-lists—for the weather was never too hot for that—and as soon as he had heard the tale, he went for his hat, a writing-case, and a double-barrelled pistol; which he loaded, and pocketed, without the knowledge of the ladies. "Now, we'll checkmate the red-faced man," he said to Mrs. Tubbs, as they set forth together; "no lawyer in the land can draw a better will than I can. Ha! here comes the rain, and in earnest too! Take my arm, madam; I will keep you dry."

The old house was shaken to its deep foundations, by the din of rolling thunder, and the long windows glared with the fire of the skies; but the old earl was sitting, with the leaded lattice open, cherishing the last breath of above-ground air. The butler of the house, a very old dependent, had been sent up by the housekeeper, before she hurried forth He was standing by the curtain now,

overcome with want of courage, flinching from the lightning, and the tempest roar outside; flinching even worse, from that which he must soon look straight at—the growth of death before him; and still from habit, peering towards the staircase door, in fleshly dread of his bugbear, Mr. Gaston.

"Here I am, my lord," said Mr. Snacks, advancing boldly; "grieved to hear how much your lordship has suffered from the recent heat. At last the change has come; and I hope, it will benefit your lordship."

"That is no concern of yours. You are here to draw my will. To what firm do you belong?"

"The long established firm, your lordship, of Snacks, Giblets, Tucker and Co. I am the senior partner, William Snacks, entirely at your service."

"If you were not respectable," said the earl, with his old keen look revived—for he did not like the style of man—"Tubbs would not have called you in. And if you can draw a valid will, it does not matter who you are. Now put into legal form what I tell you. 'I, Earl Delapole'—describing me aright—'leave all that I have to dispose of, to my only surviving son, Lewis Arthur, now Viscount Pole, for his absolute use, and I appoint him my sole executor, if he be surviving. But, if he be dead, I leave all the above to his children, if any; and if none, to the right heirs of my lands and titles; appointing in that case as my executor, Mr. Thomas Latimer, of the firm of Latimer and Emblin, who have long been my solicitors. For legacies, I leave £1,000 to Mrs. Tubbs, my housekeeper; to each of my domestic servants £50; and to my agent, George Gaston, the pair of felt slippers, which he stole from me, to come skulking about my door at night.' Be sure you put that in. Tell me, when you are ready."

Entering into the spirit of the man—hot and imperious to the last—Snacks, with his writing materials ready, called for a large supply of candles. For the play of lightning, round the house, and across the open windows, dimmed, and sometimes seemed to quench, the pale and feeble light inside. Then with a good many amplifications, and fine sweep of verbiage, in the manner of the most accomplished lawyer—who after slaying his slain three times, drags him nine times round the walls—Mr. Snacks discharged his meaning, and comparatively that of the testator also.

"There is no time to waste in words; put it anyhow," said the earl, who knew much more of law than his new lawyer. "I have little to dispose of. The land is all secured. The chief thing is

about executor. Gaston was that; but he won't be now. I feel better. It has done me good to discharge this bit of business. Snacks, you shall have fifty guineas—though you are no lawyer, any more than I am, and I remember something about you now—when you bring me a receipt for this concern, from Latimer and Emblin. They are to keep it dark, you know—not to write to me about it—only to see that it is valid, and give you a private receipt for it. Now let us have the witnesses. Tubbs is no good; Tubbs is a fat legatee—no allusion to your figure, loyal Tubbs. I am not going to die yet; don't you think it. I love the lightning; it has set me free. Be off, all of you, as soon as this is done with. I shall go to sleep, exactly as I am; give the Devil legal notice, that I don't intend to die."

His lordship was right. After duly executing this last will, and testament, he turned over in his chair; and his mind was so relieved, that he enjoyed a bowl of ox-tail soup, next morning.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE ISLAND ROCKS.

BRISK with air, and sparkling ways, and melodies of water, Island Glen, on a sunny day, is a place to sit in patiently. The river, breaking through a fissure of the hills, with two dark tors to guard it, divides among vast blocks of granite, into myriad gleam, and shade. Standing up in scores of tons, the granite scorns the water, as a thing that has come to cool its feet, and may dribble below its instep. The water, believing in its own business, and heedless of stony contempt, comes on, with a thousand checks; but at every check, scattering bright loquacity. The gravity of grey-bearded boulders only makes it leap the more, and spread in tumbling shelves around them, to meet again in some calm pool.

In spite of hard rocks, there is brushwood here, and even some leafy attempt of trees. Dwarf oak, birch, and alder, nestle, below the brown ravage of the upland gales, with the kind encouragement of the stream, across whose spray they shed their own. And here, beside the white foam, glisten scarlet waves of mountain-ash, a companion cascade of coral.

Under the largest tree, that lapped the water both with root and branch, Gruff Howell sat, with his long gun, waiting for young

Squire Westcombe. He was thinking of his own sad plight, and the tangle he was stepping into, less through love of justice perhaps, than fear of sad injustice. For he knew, that not his licence only, but his liberty was imperilled, by the freedoms of the outlaws now assembling at the *Raven*. It behoved him, however, to be very wary, in his dealings with that crew; unless he were resigned (which as yet, he was not) to contribute, personally, to the nurture of the young birds on the ivied crag. Gruff was a resolute man, but owed his life to himself, and his native land.

These reflections had given him pause, and made him regret, in the clear sunlight, the gratitude of his moonlight mood. His life had been saved, by the courage of another; and he certainly had, for a limited period, felt a sort of gratitude. This strange feeling—the rarest of all our sensations, and the most fugitive—was now beginning to be explained away, by the larger logic of the tranquil mind.

"He pulled me out of a bog, it is true; but why did he do it? Why, to please himself. Of course he got wet; but not half so wet as I was. It was a wonder that he hooked me; for he never ventured out of his own depth. And after all, I had better have gone down, than found things, as they were, when I got home. He did not even know who I was—pooh, pooh! One may make too much fuss of things. I am thankful, of course, and all that. But still, I am not going out of my way, about it. What I have to consider is, what will be most for my own good. And, unless I see my way to something, I am not going to put my life in danger. Anybody might have done it. I would have done it for him, and never mentioned it. Directly you come to look fairly at it, 'tis an accident, not an obligation. It will be very nasty of him, if he thinks I owe him anything."

John Westcombe did not think, that Mr. Howell owed him anything. He was not come here, to obtain reward for his little service in saving life; and he did not even expect to hear anything to care about. Having been asked to come, he came; for the place suited well with his land-falls; and he thought to hear some trifle, more to interest, than concern him. With his strong light step, he came across the rocks, balancing his gun upon his shoulder; while the lemon-coloured setter, having found a retired watering-place, lay down in it, and lapped; and with his ears adrip, cherished a pious, but futile hope, that his fleas would go floating down the river.

"I hope you are none the worse, for your wetting," said West-

combe, as soon as he descried the other man; "it was a long way to walk home, with wet clothes on."

"No, sir, I find myself all the better," the innkeeper answered, with a lift of finger half-way towards his cowskin cap; "I had got a bit of a cold coming on; but the peat-water seem to have took 'un away."

"I have heard of that, more than once. No doubt there is some good reason for it. The peat-water never is so cold as the river-water, I believe. But you asked me to come, about something."

"So I did, sir; so I did. But a ticklish thing, for me to talk of, and requires understanding. Perhaps you have heard of Captain Larks, not far from where you pulled me out. He lies to the bottom of it. But least said, soonest mended. What concern to you or I, if they put a bullet into him?"

"It would be a very great concern to me, and to you too—I should hope—to dream of such an atrocious murder. Speak out, Howell. You had better tell me all."

"My own belief is," said Gruff, quite calmly; "that it isn't the captain they are after. What good could he be, to any of them? But I hear them say, that he hath a young daughter, a very fine-looking maid indeed; and betwixt you and I, sir, excusing my opinion, what they want most is, to get hold of missy. However, I better say no more. Least said, soonest mended."

"You are wrong there;" said Jack, with his eyes so fierce, that Howell went further back, under the tree. "Either you will tell me all you know, or I will pitch you from this rock into that black hole; and out you don't come again, my fine fellow. Tush for your gun—I will snap it in two."

He wrenched the man's gun from his hand, as he spoke, and struck his knee under the breech, to snap it across the stock; but the man looked at him piteously, and did not move.

"Very well," said Westcombe; "I will spare it. I don't want to spoil a fine gun, if I can help it. But make up your mind, that I will stand no nonsense. I had no right to threaten your life, my man; and I am sorry that I did so, for it was a cowardly thing to do. But unless you carry out your promise, I will march you to my father's house; and to jail you go, as a thieves' accomplice. Make your choice, in one minute, Howell. I am not in a mood to be trifled with."

This was plain enough, without words; but the old man saw, that there was room for reason, as the young one recovered self-control.

"You can march me, wherever you please," he said, as if he must put up with tyranny; "because you are a young man and I am an old one; and you are twice as big as me. But for all that, you don't get a word out of me; without it is by fair means, Squire Westcombe."

"I should like to know what you call 'fair means.' If you mean bribery, you shall have none. Though of course, your behaviour would be borne in mind, when the licensing question arises. Else you will have to quit for certain, as a notorious harbourer of thieves. Now make your choice in one minute, Griffith Howell."

"Well, sir, you leave little choice. But I care not much, what comes of it. Nothing but one thing makes me care to stick in that old rats' castle. One thing only; and I dare say, nothing will come of it, as usual."

'Tell me what it is; unless it is a secret." Westcombe looked at him, with a kindly heart, for he saw by the glisten of the old man's eyes, that some tender feeling moved him.

"Nothing, sir. Only I was thinking of my son—a gadabout fellow, the same as I have been. But not a bad sort, Squire Westcombe. As fine a nature, as the Lord ever made."

"Let me know something about him;" said Jack, with no pursuit of his own ends; but because he had that gift of interest in other people's affairs, which made the colonel so popular.

"It is a long tale, sir; and a sad one. But a better soldier never lived, than my son Rees, in the Spanish country. He was in the light cavalry, five campaigns; and I followed the army as much for his sake, as to make my pickings out of it. Since the penny post came in, they brought me a letter from him. And I been in hopes to see him ever since; and if I was driven out, from where I be, he might come, and he must go again."

"You shall not be driven out. I will take care of that," young Westcombe answered, as if he were the chairman of the quarter sessions; "all you have to do, my friend, is to tell me everything you know. Sooner or later, and perhaps very soon, a stop must be put to the lawless doings, that have been the disgrace of our neighbourhood. When you talk of danger to Captain Larks, and even to—to the members of his household, you must perceive that things are going much too far. Have you thrown in your lot, with such miscreants?"

"No, sir. But I have let them creep in round me, and order me out of my own house. There was only one at first; and he paid me fair; and came for his letters, and all that. There seemed to be

no harm. It was no concern of mine, to know him from the man in the moon; and so long as he brought no others, I put up with it; though I guessed that he was a wild one. It was not my place to betray him, was it; though I guessed that he was a bad one?"

"Certainly not. You were quite right there. As long as he behaved well on your premises, it was no concern of yours. You stood in the position of a host to him."

"So I did, sir; reasonably, and by sound interpretation. But when he began to make a feasting place of my poor inn, and bring stolen sheep there, and black sheep from the mines to eat them, it was a different pair of shoes. I found myself put against the law, and the law put against me, more and more. And when I was ordered about, like a slave, and had to be out of bed all night, and could not even get my money——"

"Ah, that was very bad indeed. The least they could do was to pay upon the nail."

"That they did not, sir. And if I said a word, they would roast me, in front of my own joints—leastwise, what they makes me cook for them. It have come to such a pitch, that I can't abide it. Why, what do you think their last move is? The craze of the world is free-trade now; and free they make with my trade. Every one must have of me everything he likes, pretty much at his own figure; and then they come, and clear my till for me. They tell me that is the true free-trade. Squire, it is time to put a stop to it."

"It shall be stopped;" Jack Westcombe answered, stamping on the granite, as he spoke. "We hold a warrant now against one fellow. General Punk himself came with it; because there had been a good many before; but nothing was ever done with them. So my father locked it up, till needed; and the general has been ill ever since. You might as well throw it into the fire, as to give it to the 'police,' to execute. But it is quite new, and it should do something. We have found out his right name at last—'Guy Wenlow;' they had it 'George' before."

"For sure now, that made it all wrong," said Howell, with a Welshman's nicety in law; "we call him 'the black gentleman;' for a gentleman he must have been, some day. You never saw any man so knowing of his vittles; which downright proves the gentleman. But who is to catch him, sir? I won't be a party to it. Although he has carried on with me, too bad."

"Howell, I respect your feelings there. Treachery is of all things the lowest. You shall not be asked to do anything of that sort, upon your own premises. At the same time, you may, in all fairness, tell

me what their designs are upon Captain Larks. Otherwise, you become a party to them. How many of them are there?"

"Four, sir. All of them desperate men; enough to overpower any household. Every one of them carries his life in his hand; and little he seems to care for it. Wenlow, as you call him, is the master of them, and can handle them as he pleases. It is clear to my thinking, that he gets his orders from some one, who keeps out of sight—somebody with money, and some end to serve; or why should he deal with such a gang? Captain Larks is at the bottom of it; not to do things, but to be done by. Sir, do you know, what has crossed my mind? It was through my thinking of my son, that it came to me. From what I heard say, I made up my mind, to have a good look at that Captain Larks, without his knowing of it. And so I did. And if ever I saw a man well-known to me, in the times when the great fighting was, Captain Larks is the man, and no mistake."

"We have no business with what he used to do;" Jack answered quickly, in his loyalty of Rose; for he really feared, after many dark surmises, and hints from divers quarters, that the father of his beloved had done something beyond inquiry; "the only question we have to deal with is—what do these fellows want with him?"

"Well, sir, that is more than I can say," replied the landlord of the *Raven;* "but something to do with the old thing, most likely, They watch him close enough; I can answer for that. They don't tell me, of course, what their orders are; but I hear them talk, more than they think of. I believe their orders are to shoot him outright, if he tries to go off suddenly. But if they get wind of his meaning to go, their plan is to carry off his daughter; that he may stay at home to look for her. Anyhow, he is not to go from home."

"Upon my word, a very pretty state of things!" Jack exclaimed so loudly, that the other put his hand up—"a gentlemen is not to leave his own house, not to go about his own business even, without the permission of a lot of sheep-stealers! Howell, I don't believe a word of your nonsense."

"Well, sir, please yourself about all that. Only I have told you my opinion, at the risk of my life; and if you laugh at it, you can't well blame me afterwards. Squire, I wish you good afternoon."

"No, you shall not do anything of the sort. Here you are, and here you stop; until I have something settled with you. What good do you do me, by vague warnings? I want to know, how to stop such mischief, and to punish every mother's son of them. If a scoundrel was scheming against me, to suit his own rascally purposes,

do you think I wouldn't have it out with him? And when it is done against those that I love, am I likely to run away, and let them do it? Howell, I shall go with you, to your house."

Whatever his licence may be, no man desires to be consumed on his own premises.

"No, sir," said Howell; "it would make a great row; which is just the thing to be avoided. And what good could you do? You are strong enough, and brave enough to meet one man, I dare say. But here are four of them; and all with heavy fire-arms. You have saved my life, and I will not destroy yours; which would be done at once, if you ran in among them. The 'black gentleman' has a liking for your father—that I know, from many things—but it would not keep him from blowing out your brains, sir, if you tried to cross him. You must bear in mind, how long he has lived out of doors; and that makes men think much less of life. I have been out of doors myself, for months together; and life becomes a puff of air, among such people."

"What you say is sensible. And I have no right to bring you into danger. You have acted fairly, and kindly by me; and you shall have no reason to regret it. But the worst of it is, that I don't see what to do. I am nothing of a hand at scheming. Tell me how to stop it, and it shall be done. My plan is to collar the ringleader, to lay Wenlow by the heels in jail."

"Not at my house, sir," Howell answered; "not at my house, whatever you do. There is no house within three miles of mine. I should be murdered if you tried to do it there. But have him in his own place, if you can. No pack of hounds can come nigh an old tor-fox; and no regiment could catch Bog-Wenlow."

"Rubbish! I should only like to join hands with a certain friend of mine, who knows that fellow; and within a week we'd have him fast enough. I don't know him by sight; or I would have a shy at him immediately. He shifts about, here, there, and everywhere, they say; according to the weather, and his wants, or whims; but Cranmere is his head-quarters, I believe; and I know Cranmere as well as any one can know it. I have been there, several times, to look for him."

"So you might, sir, fifty times; and he be there all the time, without your twigging him. I can give you a case, of what I know to be a fact. He laid a guinea each, with them other three chaps, that they would not find him there, if they searched all day; and he gave his honour to go on as usual, cook his dinner, smoke his pipe, sit out in the sun—if there would be any—and go on like a common

turf-cutter. Well, sir, they hunted all day, and they vowed that there could not be a snipe there, out of mark, and that he was a liar ; and they were blessed, if they would pay,—when sudden there he was, in the middle of them, with one of them new-fangled pipes in his mouth, that are made of the froth of the sea, by all account. He had been there, all day, looking at them sometimes ; sometimes not concerned to do it."

"I don't believe a rap of all that story," said Jack, who was hardened into disbelief, at Oxford ; "I don't mean to say that you exaggerate at all. You believe it, no doubt, because you heard them tell it. And perhaps they believed it. But I don't. Unless the day was full of thick fog ; and of that there has not been much, you know, for a most unusual time. The springs are very low ; the bogs are down. Cranmere is only three or four miles from here. Howell, make your mind at ease. I shall have that fellow, in a day or two. And of course, I shall hold you clear of it. Nobody shall know, that I have even seen you."

"If I may ask you a favour, sir, it would be to leave it, till my son comes home. Rees is the bravest man, that ever stepped the earth, and might have been an officer, except for being bashful. He knows all the ins, and outs, of half the bogs on Dartmoor ; and the turn of his mind is, to catch the proper end of things. Not to go dwelling on this side-stroke, or on that ; but to lay hold on the core of it, and pull it up to daylight. Ah, if he had only been born, when I was, he would have stood next to the duke, by now."

"Then I wish, with all my heart, that he was here," said Jack, whose forehead was wrinkled with a world of doubts ; "my father has been a great officer, but he waits for authority always."

"So he ought, sir ; so he ought ; and I beg you to do the same, Squire Westcombe, concerning of my poor premises. I have put myself straight anyhow, with you, sir."

"Yes, to a certain extent, you have. I shall take my own course ; but I will keep you clear of trouble. You want to be off. Good-bye, my friend ! Let me know at once, if your son comes home. But don't expect me to wait for him. I shall keep a very sharp look-out, and strike, if I get the opportunity."

CHAPTER XLIII.

TWO PROUD MEN.

IN spite of all these turmoils on its banks, the Christow went on well, although the summer was so dry, and long. For this water came from a noble depth of bog, purely inexhaustible; and the bell-ropes of the church, with three men upon a plank, had failed to give sign of its having any bottom. And not only so, but if anything happened, to choke the gullet of that bog, this fortunate brook possessed at least a dozen little pitchers, bedded in the hill-side, and with crystal radiance brimmed. Each had a very small supply to start with; and a stone could overwhelm, or a turf of dried peat sponge it up: but after a little run, they ran faster, and rejoicing leaped into one another's bosoms.

Therefore, there still was green sward here, and green bushes waving off all dreams of autumn, in the captain's garden, where the sun was mild. Refreshing sounds arose, through the brushwood overhanging; and the play of light was pleasant, in the channel of the shadows. But what heed do men pay, to such trifles, when their minds are working, and their hearts are up?

Two proud men stood, facing one another, on the quiet grass bank here, beside the little river. Not proud unjustly, neither manifesting pride, nor even conscious of it; though its power underlay every tone of their voices, and turn of their thoughts. In little things, there could have been no humbler men, none more gentle, slow to anger, mild, and quiet-hearted.

"Am I to understand, once for all," asked Colonel Westcombe, looking firmly at the other, whose eyes met his, with equal firmness; "that you refuse me any kind of explanation?"

"Beyond any doubt, you must understand it so. I am sorry that it is so. But so it is; and must be."

"Have you considered, that it is not only your own question, but also that of others? That this set obstinacy wrecks the prospects of one, who is dearer to you than yourself? I mean not only as concerns my son—though he loves her dearly, and would have made her happy—but also concerning all her chance of settling, in her own rank of life, with a man she could respect?"

"All that I have thought of, not only now, but for years; and it grieves me deeply; but it does not alter my resolve."

"You admit, that you could clear yourself, if you chose," the colonel's glance was very keen, and almost stern; "you admit that

a word from you is the only thing needed, to make your daughter happy, with us or elsewhere ; as well as to set yourself right with the world ? And yet, from some miserable pride, you refuse it ?"

"I have not admitted anything of the kind. You have put your own construction upon the case. And it is not for you, to talk of pride."

"I see what you mean. You have rebuked me there. But only from the most romantic point of view. Can you expect me to look over the position, in which you choose to stand ?"

"No, Colonel Westcombe, I do not," Mr. Arthur answered calmly ; "neither would I let you do so, if you wished it. The remedy is simple—have nothing more to say to us."

"And you can put it all aside, like that ? As if you had no flesh, or blood, in you !"

"What else can you expect ? It is the manner of the world—the world you belong to, and which governs now your actions. You scorn me, because I despise its opinions. You must act by its judgment. I act by my own."

"I can believe of you," Colonel Westcombe answered, with a gaze of deep astonishment, "anything, and everything, when you talk thus. There is nothing that such a man may not do ; because he is his own standard. But there never yet was any one, so wise, and grand, as to measure himself aright, by his own measure."

"That is the last thing, I would desire to do. I prize the good opinion of all good men—and especially yours, Colonel Westcombe."

Mr. Arthur bowed, to end the conversation thus. But the colonel, who was looking rather harshly at him, because he thought him arrogant, caught a gleam in his eyes, that changed the tone of thought, and feeling, towards him.

"My dear fellow, we have stood together, with our lives upon the wind ; and caring for them, as little as for the wind itself. In deadly peril, you saved my life. But for your wonderful courage, I could not be here now, to speak to you. I hope that I never was a coward ; but I could better believe it of myself, than of you. I beg you, as one who could love you as a brother—drop this dark mystery between us. If you forgot yourself once, confess it bravely. There are moments, when none of us know what we do. Only scatter that horrible charge of treachery, which was imported into your sad business—and I will face the world about it, side by side with you ; and your Rose, and my Jack, shall be happy together. Pole, as a dear friend, I take your hand, and ask a favour."

Then the pride of the other man was beaten, by this large humility; and the cold decision of his gaze was lost. Conquered by the kindness of this old friend—the man of integrity, unspotted honour, wide fame, and large benevolence, he bowed his head, and said—"Give me one month longer. One month more, is all I ask. And surely your son, hot and hasty as he is, will be able to endure one month of doubt."

"Jack is a hot-headed fellow," said the colonel, smiling, as he always did, when he had to say anything about his son; "a month to Jack, is as much as a twelvemonth to us, who know how time goes. But, upon the whole, he has behaved most wonderfully well, throughout these proceedings. You scarcely seem to understand my son; but at least, you will do him justice there."

"Gladly I will," answered Mr. Arthur; "I have been rough to him, once or twice; as much for your sake, as my own. Because I knew, how you would be vexed about this. But I will own to you, that if I had the choice of the world for my son-in-law, I would choose your son."

"Nobly said, most nobly said!" cried the colonel, with great warmth seizing the hand of the captain, and getting a good grip from it; "and I will tell you, my dear fellow, that though I have seen very little of your Rose, I love her, as I would love a daughter of my own. You may think me very hasty, and very sentimental. And it is not for me to say otherwise. But my judgment is considered, by good judges, to be very sound, and slow. May I tell Jack, what you have said about him? He is slightly depressed, and rather melancholy. Perhaps you have found me harsh, through that. But what you have said of him will set him up again."

"Certainly, tell him. I owe him great amends. I was very short with him, when I caught him going on—you understand; as we might have done, in our young days."

"Yes, yes. True enough, we never make allowances. We are bound to keep them down; we must scold and snub them. But when we come to think of it, we begin to feel, that we ought to have remembered, what we used to do. What a pair they will make; if the Lord allows it! They seem to have been cut out, for one another. But we won't tell them that, till it comes to smooth sailing. They shan't see each other for a month; that is certain. At any rate, not with our approbation. Jack is under excellent discipline—Punk observed it, with great admiration—though, now and then, he gets over me; and he can manage his mother, more

than I can. However, we will put him upon his honour. He never fails of that—as you know."

"Well," replied the captain, with a twinkle in his eyes; "he would not be like his father, if he ever failed in that. And he is like his father; and that set me in his favour, the first time he came to catch my fish."

"Aha!" exclaimed the colonel, to whom a very obvious joke was none the less attractive; "and he has caught your fish, your pet of all fishes. But he has not quite landed her yet. Time will show. But let us have patience. I am satisfied to leave it so. How glad I am, that I came to see you, at last! It makes things so much more comfortable."

CHAPTER XLIV.

SMINTHEUS.

SATURDAY, in its proper course comes round, bringing to school-boys half-holiday (ennobled by a lie-a-bed to-morrow), to working men wages, and intellectual delights, to women a zeal to go marketing, and an emulous desire, not to cheat, but only to get the right side of their little bargains (for the pleasure of proving their wit, by its fruits), and to gentlemen responsible, and ladies ornamental, a Christian gratitude, that the week is over.

This was the large way, in which the flight of time was regarded from the heights of Touchwood Park. Not that there was any pride, in any bosom there. Lady Touchwood was sure, that instead of going up, she was come down, more than she could describe, from what her ideas used to be. At one time, she expected to be in the House of Lords; and nothing but the way in which Sir Joseph would insist upon seeing his money come back again, had stopped her from being there, at the coronation. But the only way to get up there, was to be in London, and to give parties to the Royal Family, and people on the stairs, especially Prime Ministers; and Sir Joseph could afford it as easy as a glove; but he stuck to his money, and he stuck to the dirt. However, she was happier, as she was. Though it had been said in Plymouth, that she was born, to adorn the most exalted rank.

Miss Touchwood thought that the people in London were probably quite as big fools, as those in Devonshire. But every young

lady, in her position, had a right to go, and see what the others were about; and it seemed to her very stingy of her father, to be giving trumpery gipsy-parties; when he ought to have taken them all to town, before the season was over. For her part, she was tired of this neighbourhood. Nobody seemed to understand her. If she quoted a line of Byron, people thought it came out of a valentine, and asked her confidentially, who had sent it; and even a French, or German proverb, was supposed to come out of a cookery-book. In a word, there was no one to associate with.

Her brother, Squire Dicky, took a different view of things. He detested clever girls, who could quote his head off, and were shocked at the idea of having beer for breakfast. He had seen enough already of society, for him; and in his veteran opinion, it was humbug. He had never known more than one girl, worth the end of a cigar—and that one had sacked him. Or at any rate, her dad had done it; and he knew she was too good for him. But he was blest, if he was going to be miserable. The time for popping at the birds was come. He would send for the finest fellow he had ever known, who had promised to be with him in September; and then there was nothing he would wish for better, than to catch that stuck-up Westcombe poaching.

Accordingly he sent for Alec Howe of Trinity, a young man of great bulk, and stature; who was happy all day with him, but wretched in the evening, when the time came for swallow-tails, and white choker. Miss Touchwood enjoyed this young visitor, with prolonged delicious cruelty. He was as shy as any youth can be, who has never met a clever and accomplished girl, and has to do the graceful to her, at a table, where everything is beyond his understanding. Julia, being in a very spiteful mood just now, from a variety of causes, missed not a single opportunity of deepening, and barbing, his bashful embarrassment. Beneath her clear gaze, his great hand shook, and his big lips opened, and closed, in silence; and nearly as much of his sillery, or hock, passed outside, as inside his throat. And yet he was a gentleman by birth, and of cleaner descent than his fair tormenter; only not familiar with wealthy ways.

Now this young man, and his host, the noble Dicky, were come home from a long day's shooting, that second Saturday in September. They had done well; for Howe was a fine shot; and Dicky pretty good, if he began well; though when he began ill, he would shoot amiss all day. That day he began well (by shooting a cat, who was hunting young rabbits, in a turnip-field), and he had gone on well,

killing two birds out of three, which is not bad work for a Cambridge man. Also they had shot a hawk, and two whimbrels, three or four landrails, and some hares, and coneys, making altogether a nice mixed bag, which they spread out on the capping of a low curved wall, where the road to the stables, and the kitchen-parts, divided. This was Dicky Touchwood's beloved camping-place, commanding easy access, both to men and women, and allowing him to get into view of either; or upon occasion to mediate between them. And to say, that the servants always liked him to be there, proves that he was a very honourable youth.

When Dicky, and his friend and hero, Alec, had spread out their game, to the utmost advantage, and stroked and felt everything, as if the defunction of its virtue went into the slayer—as the Norsemen, and Red Indians believed—they spread out their own noble bodies on the handy, or rather perhaps legsome, height of the low wall. Howe, being six feet and a quarter high, found the wall rather too low for him; but Dicky had his legs hanging above ground and his neat heels drumming. The head game-keeper, with his honest bluffness, stood a little way off, looking affable, for the young gents had not hurt his feelings much that day; and admiring stablemen in their shirt-sleeves approached, with a venerating hope of beer.

"How do you feel, Alec?" asked the lightsome Dicky; "I am as dry, as a hard-roed red herring. What do you vote for, champagne, or swipes? There's a first-rate 36 of Burton, just on tap."

"I go in for that;" answered Howe, in whose mind champagne was now sadly associated with the very dry sparkle of Julia.

"So do I, with all my heart. But the deuce of it is, that I have found a key working the old governor's best lock, where he keeps some stuff, that he thinks no end of. And I feel that I shall have earned no ease of mind, until I have had a good peg at it. Tell you what I'll do, to make it square. We'll enjoy the swipes; and these chaps shall have champagne."

"Don't be such a fool;" said Alec Howe. Although he had not yet seen Sir Joseph, he guessed, from many sources, what he was like. But Dicky was off, to carry out his new idea.

"Why shouldn't they have what they like?" he inquired, coming back, with young Solomon behind him, whose face was in a bubble of anticipation; "now this boy pours out lashings of wine perpetually; yet he never tastes it, except when he licks the glasses. Sol, my lad, you shall have first bumper. See your father draw

the corks for you! Why, your name is Cork—you are the son of a cork. Now see, how I send you up into the liquid sky!"

Of the loftier humanities fostered at Cambridge, a main one was the art of discharging a cork full bang, from a bottle of poppish fluid, without loss. The process requires some experience, and quickness; but Dicky was a Master of Arts therein. He took a long pull at the pewter of ale, looking towards Alec, and in three half minutes, had three bottles of his father's most choice comet vintage "on tap," (as he termed it) for the brave stablemen. The keeper stood aloof, and would not touch it.

Suddenly, in the very midst of them, stood the master of the the place, Sir Joseph Touchwood, cold, and pale, with quiet rage. With a sweep of his hand, he struck over all the bottles, then emptied the can of ale upon his son's head, and without a word to any one, strode off to the front door.

"My criky, we are in for it!" the poor boy spluttered, through the deluge of beer, which had checked his breath; "I never saw the governor in such a way before. But don't you be frightened, my good fellows. I will take all the row. You needn't turn a hair. And you shall have your three bottles, if I have to buy them. What an extravagant old cove it is!"

Calling his friend, Alec Howe, who was trying to smile at this great outbreak, the heir of the Touchwoods went in, with all the dignity he could compass, by the kitchen door, made Alec pump over him, at a servant's sink, and then hurried up, to his dressing-room. He strove to be wrathful, but fear was foremost; and his teeth chattered sadly, as he got into his bath. He would have given all his ready cash—which he kept low,—for a little private talk with his dear mother. But her ladyship was dressing, and he got no chance of sending a message to her.

Very soon, he was trying to compose his mind, by smoothing the pile of a velvet waistcoat—for which he owed £3 10*s.* in Cambridge, and admiring in the glass the gentle dawn of reddish whiskers, brightened and strengthened, as examination showed, by the rich shower of fine-bodied ale. "I will rub them with the very best Bass, every day, and perhaps then Rose will like me," he was saying to himself, when a knock at the door made him jump, and a little note came under it. Running to the door, he called out, "Judy, Judy dear, darling Judy!" for he knew the sound of her firm light step; "Julia, I want you desperately." But either she could not, or she would not hear; and the whisk of her dress was a memory round the corner.

"I shall have to do it all, by myself," he groaned, for he guessed too well what the letter was; "in for a penny, in for a pound. At any rate, the relieving officer shall know what I think of him. Halloa!"

The relieving officer,—as the male parent was called in those days, at our great universities,—had set down these few words, for his study. "Richard, as there will be no dinner to-day, I shall be glad to see you, in the dining-room, five minutes from receipt of this. (Signed) Joseph Touchwood."

"What a kettle of fish! Don't you wish you may catch it? I'll have a bar-out. The stable-cads shall supply me with grub, through the windows. But the governor would cut it, with a demon-laugh, and leave a brace of dogberries to run me in. I will quit me, like a man. I'll go down, and have it out. 'Never say die,' is the ticket for soup."

When the young man appeared, in the barren dining-room, he saw his father sitting in the six-legged chair, too deep in thought, even to look at him. His face was very stern, but with trouble, more than anger; and Dicky saw, that larger things than his, had gone amiss. He began to say jauntily—"Why, where's the dinner?" which was a serious concern to him. But his father made no answer; so he stood, and waited.

"Who is there? Oh, Richard, is it? Boy, stand, and look at me. I am not going to talk to you, about my affairs; but simply to explain, what yours will be. Hitherto, you have led a life of idle pleasure. Henceforth you will have to earn your own bread. Before I was half your age, I was doing that. It will make a man of you. How do you like the thought of it?"

"Not—not at all, sir. In fact I could not do it. I have never been accustomed to such proceedings."

"Very well. You need not begin, till Monday. To-morrow, you will get your clothes together, and live at my expense, as usual. On Monday morning, you will shoulder what you want for immediate use, and be off at six o'clock, for the office of Mr. Growgray at Stonehouse. Mr. Growgray is a well-known dry-salter; and, through my connection with him, he has promised most kindly, to find an opening for you. I have paid a considerable premium to him, and your salary will be a pound a week—a great deal more, I fear, than you will be worth, for a very long time, at any rate. Your stock of clothes will last you, for at least two years; and I shall endeavour to allow you five shillings a week, for pocket-money. Also, you will be allowed to come, and see your mother

and your sister wherever they may be) one Sunday in every three months."

"It is quite impossible that you can be in earnest. Sir, you must either be —— "

"No, I am neither mad, nor intoxicated; nor even hasty in this arrangement. It has been thought of for some months; while you were busy with your rats, and rabbits. Nature has made you a fool; and circumstances have concurred with nature. You are now provided with a good start in life. Fools always prosper the best, in the end. I have often heard you boast, that almost everybody likes you. That lays the foundation of a large sound trade."

"But I can't be a dry-salter, and I won't be a dry-salter, and I never could put up with the smell of it," Squire Dicky declared, as he fell into a very luxurious chair, and embraced it. "Why, I should have to sit upon a three-leg'd stool!"

"No; you might stand all day, if you preferred it. However, that is all the choice before you. Now leave me; I have more important things, to think of."

Dicky Touchwood was quick of thought about himself; but even on that subject now, his readiness was gone; so sudden was this outrage, and so overwhelming. He arose, without looking at his father, and made off; but his spirit came back, when he got to the door. "Sir, you will be sorry for attempting this," he said, with his voice half-choked by tears; "I have plenty of good friends, who will stand by me. I will not go near any vile drysalter. If you turn me out of doors, I will get an honest living as a rat-catcher, and contract for all the rats at Plymouth."

CHAPTER XLV.

THE MUZZLE MUZZLED.

DARTMOOR, many-fountained Dartmoor, mother of a myriad streams, and wet nurse of a million mists, is not often scrimped with drought; but when the drought once gets established, how it smites the rocky land! Furze, and heath, dwarf rush, and bracken, even the cotton-grass of the swamp, and sedge that lines the tinkling rill, fade into one dreary yellow, or dingy red, that jades the sight. The power of the dry sun is reflected from the stark rocks down the vales, and nothing is hidden from the heat thereof.

When such seasons come, they are so far asunder (in the hills and valleys of the distant years) that nobody remembers that they ever came before. And with one accord the people there, not being used (like brick-bound townsmen) to an unventilated oven, begin to make sad complaint, and outcry; which add ten per cent. to their temperature. They then fan themselves with their husband's hats—as many as have got husbands—and they feel that they owe it for a duty to the world, not to be over-charitable. In fact, they are cross, and they make the worst of everything, in the spirit of the flies that enter into their weak places.

Even at Christowell (cool and crystal, with the wandering leisure and bright import of the brook), dryness of the ground, and of the skin, began to tell upon the childen, and the women, and the men. Not one of them all had the least idea, that it made any difference to her, or to him; but every one had a very large perception, that no one else was, as he ought to be. Horse-flies began to descend upon mankind, in lack of their nobler nurture, spotted flies, with broad heads and big tweezers; and wherever there was moisture for a gnat to nip, he nipped, and was exceeding thirsty.

But, if in the valley, where the grass still grew, and the leaves still cherished the nursing of the brook, nature was depressed, and her mighty masters petulant; how much worse must the pest of season be, on the brown, unshadowed, and unswarded crags! And worst of all round the dry desert of the *Raven;* where mine-slag, sparry rocks, and spelter dust combined, to glare with intense heat, and cast it all around. All around was heat, and drought, dull tremor of the air, and pulse of haze, that twinkles when the dews of night are drained. Even the moormen would not come, to get their usual pint of ale, sadly although they needed it, for fear of the fury of the vipers round it, and the sun-death in the glare of rock.

However, the house, with its thick granite walls, and stone-floors watered from the well, was fresh with cooling shade inside, and the glisten of cool tankards. "Gentleman Wenlow"—as he now was called, from the dinners he had given there—sat without reproach, in a cambric-bosomed shirt (kindly borrowed from Parson Short), and considered the business that lay before him. The heat of the weather had stopped his parties, for the moment, because no meat would keep, and his guests declined to face the yellow distance from their greener glens. Upon the whole indeed, this gentleman was not much displeased with that. It was quite as well to intermit the duties of a host, whilst this roasting weather held; and to steal

sheep enough for his own consumption, was as much as an active man could do.

Therefore it was not social need, or sense of solitude that made him frown, as he sat with his cooling pot, of cider, rum, and borage, thinking how to carry out the orders of his patron. These were easy enough to understand, but not quite so easy to execute; even with the aid of the blackest boon companions. And the matter, from a moral point of view, was not altogether to his liking. For a long time now, he had been compelled to appropriate alien property. But he had striven to do this with a lenient hand, and a fine regard for justice, robbing only those who could afford it, and robbing even them at honest intervals, impartially. All his laxities were of necessity, all his lapses caused by largeness. What man has any right to own the earth, with a hundred better people born upon it, every minute? And if he cannot own the earth, as the whole includes the parts, how can he own any part of it? How much less then, can he be the owner of the things that move about on it, and have got four legs; while he, who lays claim to them, has only got two? Such reasoning is unanswerable; or if it can be answered, the best of the argument is with him, who has had the dinner, and digested it.

But what Guy Wenlow did not like, and in spite of his reputation found to be outside his province, was the commission of downright murder, in cold blood, and with no excuse. Captain Larks had never harmed him, whereas George Gaston had been his ruin. With pleasure would he have shot the latter, in conflict, or upon insult; whereas now the relentless force of facts was driving him, too surely, towards the necessity of shooting the other. His orders newly received were brief, sadly to the point, and stringent —"It is too late for weak measures now. To carry off the girl is useless. If he leaves home, you shall swing for it. I am not like the fools round Dartmoor. Make a short job of it, for your own sake. With management, there can be no risk. Trust to me, for your escape, and a better land to winter in, with plenty of cash, and no more skulking. Let me hear of no more delay. If I have to come down, it will be the worse for you. I am watching you; and you have no escape, from me, or without me. Turn upon me, if you dare. Obey me, and you shall be free, rich, and happy."

The writer had taken good care, that none should identify his writing. It was hopeless, for a poor felon to denounce, or even break with him. The tempter had not allowed him funds, to attempt escape across the sea; and Wenlow even began to

suspect, that Howell was bribed against him. His only chance lay in obedience to the deeper, and wealthier scoundrel. His own life was set against that of another; and he must not indulge in scruples. It would be a very easy business, to dispose of Captain Larks. Through many a flying visit, and many a lair among the bushes, he knew the ins, and outs, and rounds among beloved plants and trees, of that too sanguine gardener. And his favourite double-barrel'd gun would carry a ball, as true as any rifle, and was certain for a rabbit at a hundred yards. At six o'clock, on this evening of the week, the captain was sure to be in his little vineyard, sitting on a pot, with his deep-bowled meerschaum, and presenting the very finest target for a shot. What right had any man to be so happy, and go on, as if the world was a playground for him?

With a frown, to confirm his resolution, he gulped the contents of his tankard; and then it occurred to him, that nothing could be easier than to secure proofs of *alibi*, in case of the worst coming to the worst, and a charge being made against him. He knew that Gruff Howell was not at home; but his wife was there, and would do much better. Accordingly, when everything was ready, and a bullet dropped into either barrel of his gun, he unlocked his door, and went downstairs, in his shirt-sleeves, yawning heavily. Mrs. Howell was sitting in the bar, half asleep, with her spectacles by her, and the big Bible open, at her favourite story of Joseph and his brethren, which she read daily, because it reminded her hopefully of her absent son.

"Fill this again for me, mother," said the guest, setting down his empty tankard. "What o'clock is it? Why, a quarter-past four! Are you sure your clock is right?"

"Yes, sir. Or if anything, he be a little slow. We timed 'un by the baker's watch, only yesterday; and he brought the time from Bovey tower."

"Very well. Then I shall go to sleep again. This hot weather takes all the life out of me. I am not to be disturbed, mind. I want sleeep. Only when the rabbits come, I may fire a shot at them. Don't be alarmed, if you hear my gun, about six o'clock, or so. No supper, till I call for it."

Receiving his tankard, with another stretch and yawn, he went to his room, and locked the door. Then he laid his other gun, which had once been Mr. Short's, upon the broad oak window-sill, with the lattice thrown back, and the muzzle outside, pointing towards the cliff, where the rabbits came to play, in the late afternoon, when the inn was quiet. He had shot two or three of them,

before this, from the window; and now he fitted that into his deadly scheme. He corded the gun against recoil, and set a slow fuse of hemp to the touch-hole, which would smoulder for an hour, or perhaps more; and then he descended from the window, by a method, which he had devised against attack. There was nobody to see him; all the brown moor was void with loneliness and lassitude; not a shadow, except his own, moved faster than the sun directed it. But he, at a pace that would make a lazy man lie down to watch it, scoured the hollows of the sun-burnt hills, to the wild outskirt of Christowell.

Why make we light of our parents' wisdom, why imagine so vain a thing, as that they had no eyes to see, ears to hear, or tongues to taste? Denying them every other merit, we must admit, that they knew what was good to eat, far better than we do. Would they have given as much for American flour, as for English? Would they have made their bread, with German paste, instead of brewer's yeast? Would they have bought fish, three weeks iced, and wine made where no grape gets ripe? And of the grape, and other fruit, would they have grown it for show, or for savour? Already in 1840, the rage for the pride of the eyes, and the pang of the belly, was making way among superior circles; and the ladies began to say, to one another—"if you can save my pine-apple from being cut, dear, I will lend it to you, for your dinner, on Wednesday."

But Captain Larks was happy still, in tending the good gifts of the earth, for graceful, and for grateful use. He sat upon his pot, and smoked his pipe, and working gently all the while, enjoyed the view of his own things first, and over, or between them, of the things beyond. For the wisdom of the quiet life was his—first to consider one's own affairs, without any wrath of anxiety; and then through their leisure, or over their ease, to enjoy a large view of the neighbourly cares. Thus was he behaving, in his vineyard, as soon as the heat of the sun declined, and the shade of the high parts cooled the rest, and the birds by the brook began to sing again, and the trees freshened up from the drooping of the day.

Sloping down the hillside now, the light was tempered variously, with narrow flush, broad hovering patch, and faint fringe of suffusive haze. But in bold relief, sat the gallant captain, moving both arms briskly, with his broad chest prominent between his braces, and a smile of pride upon his tranquil face. For here were his grapes, swelling off from stoning, clustering richly below their leaves, sheltered from brunt of the day, and expecting the bloom of

dew, to crisp their stalks. Some were clouding with soft blue tissue of the promised purple, some were pearly with pellucid white, others traced with stippled veins of tints that would be amber; while the rest were scarce emerging from pubescent green and grey. The gardener felt his heart maturing, with good will, towards God, and man.

"Impossible to miss him now. I can perceive the buttons of his shirt, and the beating of his heart. With this rest for my gun, I can hit him, to a square inch anywhere. He shall not even know, that he has been shot. I will give him a minute, just to finish up his pipe; and then off he goes to a far superior world."

With these thoughts, Wenlow, having dead point-blank at the self-congratulating Captain Larks, suspended his pull upon the trigger; not from mercy, but that delicacy of feeling which a man has, a smoking man, for a fellow-smoker's pipe—a feeling, whose depth is in nature's bowels, deep as the founts of calm volcanoes.

Presently the captain put his pipe down, being come duly to the end of it; and the man in the valley laid his eyes between the gun-cocks, to renew true aim at him. True enough it was, and too sure would have been the vinedresser's fate, as regards this world—when a shadow fell across, in front of him, and before him stood his daughter Rose. Wenlow drew back his fore-finger from the trigger; he could not shoot the father, in the presence of the child. "I will wait, and see how they go on," he thought; "to save my own life, I could not take his, thus." He withdrew the muzzle softly, and in the deep shade, listened.

"Father, my mind is made up," said Rose, as she threw her arms round the captain's neck, and kissed him. "I have been considering, what you said; and I mean to stick to you—to you. You say that I may come to rank, and riches, and live in a very different way from this, if I give up all thoughts of—of every one but you. But you must know well, that I never think of that. I would rather be, as I am, without those things; if I only have you, and you love me, as you used. I will try to think no more of—of poor John Westcombe; or of any other person in the world, but you. Only, it would break my heart, to go away, and be rich, and gay, and high, without him. He would think that I had deceived him, sold him, cast him off, for bright things, and great people. I would rather be dead; than be thought of so, by him. I will give him up, as you require it so. But not disgracefully—father, not disgracefully. I beg of you, to promise me one very little thing."

"My darling, there is nothing that I would not promise, rather

than see you cry, like this. You know, that you are all the world to me."

"I used to think so; but how can I think so now? The only thing I ask you to promise me, is this—that if I give him up, I shall still stop here,—here, where I have nothing; only things to love me; and where I cannot seem to have thrown him by, for grandeur. How I wish I was a little girl again, coming home for the holidays, with nothing but a Sunday hat!"

"What would Mrs. Pugsley say to such a wardrobe? My dear child, there is no earthly reason, why you should work yourself up to such a fervour. I have asked no pledge of you, and want none. I love you very dearly, dear; and all the better perhaps, for being just a little bit excitable. I hate cold-blooded people; though I am considered one of them, by those who do not know me. But surely you may have enough of confidence in me, Rose, to let me take my own time, in a matter of this kind. I have never asked you to cast off young Westcombe. I was certainly very much put out with you, for the things that took place beneath the leather-coat pippin, wrongly called the crab-tree. But I have forgiven you all that, because—because you are my darling Rose. And the utmost that I ask of you, is to wait. One way, or another, I shall soon know what to do. I may have to go away, and leave you, my dear. But I dare not leave you here, at present. I could have left you happily at Exeter, either with your good school-mistress, or with Mr. Tucker. But she is away, for her holidays; and he has no ladies in his house, at present. If I have to go suddenly, I must even trust you to the charge of Mrs. Pugsley, at Moreton; as soon as we are quit of the poor general."

"I am sure she would be very kind to me, indeed. I could do very well there, if you must go. But oh, father, don't go, if you can help it. I shall be so miserable, without you. And who will look after all our things here? What would become of all these grapes, for instance? I am sure there is a fox prowling after them, already."

"Well, we must hope that he would find them sour. Now come home, my darling. I have no heart to work any more, after seeing you in this grievous state."

As soon as they were gone, black Wenlow rose, and filled his pipe, with a happier heart than he had enjoyed for months, and years. He was conscious, according to his special form of conscience, of having done a very noble act indeed. But when he got back to the *Raven*, and found (upon clambering in, at his open

window, and going down to order supper) that his gun had gone off about half-past five, he was wroth at the waste of so much ingenuity. For no clearer *alibi* could have been proved, than the one Mrs. Howell, and two visitors in the tap-room, were ready to depose to, from the proof of their own ears.

He deserved to have his slippers, like a gentleman at his inn, who pays his way, when he can do it; and he felt that after having been so good that day, he might trust in providence against police. One of his chief merits was, that (in spite of some luxury during boyhood) he had taken to the bogs, and windy life; as if he had been born without a cradle. That was a side-shoot, so far as one may guess, perhaps of his sporting tendencies. If so, how much more was it to his credit, not to shoot a man, when he had him on his bullet! Into all this he entered, with the exhaustive comprehension of a fine mind, dwelling on its owner's compensations. Then he made a great supper, to support introspection, and slept, upon a four-footed bed, the sleep of the just, with two guns loaded.

CHAPTER XLVI.

SOME CONFUSION.

REASONABLY now was Mr. Gaston discontented with the state of things. There was not much to stand between him, and the dark flight of disgrace and ruin—"transportation beyond the seas." There might be even more than that. Forgery (lately a capital offence), was still considered next to murder; and he might get a term of hard labour first, before patriotic farewell. He had freely exerted his power to write the old earl's hand to a nicety, as well as robbed him in fifty other ways; and now the account of his stewardship lay under difficulties, far more appalling than those of the unjust steward in the parable.

So long as the old earl lived, George Gaston felt himself safe against that account. Indolence, bad health, and general cynicism had led the aged man to defer strict inquiry; though his faith in the agent had never been profound, and of late years had grown less and less. But he said to himself, that he should go from bad to worse, if he introduced new hands, to rob him; and Gaston contrived, by many insolent devices, to keep out any who might interfere, especially the good firm of Latimer and Emblin. But

now the old nobleman had nothing more to do with this world; except in the posthumous form, of last will and testament, and black-edged paper. George Gaston had left him to wrestle with his death; and there was no one nearer, or dearer, to him than Mrs. Tubbs, to close his slowly vanquished eyes.

When the great physician, Sir John Tickell, came down softly, and announced that all was over, Mr. Gaston strode forth, with a stick of black sealing-wax, nearly as large as a rolling-pin, a coil of wax-taper, and his own signet-ring; and he said to all the servants, "I must do my duty; let Tubbs come round the house, with me. I require a witness for this act." But nobody could tell him where the housekeeper was; so he took the trembling butler for his witness.

"As sole executor, I am responsible for the safe custody of everything," he pronounced, with an air of sad importance; "all his lordship's jewels, plate, documents, &c., must be put under seal at once."

Although he had stolen a good many of them, there were still enough left in chest, bureau, strong-box, writing-desk, and the like, to occupy him one good hour, in the careful discharge of this solemn duty. The butler carried a roll of red tape, and a sharp pair of scissors; and whenever the seal would not go on the slit, the tape was stretched across, and sealed.

"That makes five and thirty done, and the two room-doors, containing all the lighter things;" Mr. Gaston wiped his red face, as he was speaking; "sorrow, and duty, are alike dry things. Jenkins, go down for a bottle of old port, and be sure to bring the winding cork-screw. Here, take the key. Only one bottle, mind you." "As if I was a thief!" the old man muttered; for Gaston had the gift of offending everybody.

"Down with it, on the big table in the dining-room, you poor old numskull; will you never understand, that I am master now?"

But timid as he was, and shaking knuckles out of elbows, Jenkins had too fine a sense of order, to obey such orders. With the skill of ancient vintagers, he drew the cork, and set the bottle down upon a marble slab, with two glasses by it, that he might have one.

"Be off, old chap!" said Gaston; "when I want you, I will ring. Don't let any undertakers come near me. Tell them to send estimates to-morrow morning. Nothing else keeps such robbers down. I am in a position of responsibility; and I must have time to turn my thoughts. No, Mr. Latimer! Not now, not now. To-morrow morning, if you please."

For here was Mr. Latimer (of the reputable firm of Latimer and Emblin) advancing in the full power of grief, at the loss of a client of importance. His ancestor's shoe-buckles flashed upon his insteps, for he had not stopped to put gaiters on; above them his black silk stockings shone; the frills of his shirt were as stiff as a sting-ray; and his face as dry as a law-digest. Behind him strode his tall partner, Emblin, swinging a cane of rather sporting aspect; and behind Mr. Emblin came a gentleman, unknown to Gaston, but in haste to introduce himself.

"Gentlemen, this pleasure takes me by surprise;" Mr. Gaston spoke loudly, for they seemed to be coming on so; "decency might have induced you to wait, and self-interest too; for this is not at all the manner, to secure my custom for your firm. I understand my duties, without your aid. And you should at least have waited, till I sent for you. But as you have chosen thus, to act without me, I shall be bold enough, to act without you. When I need your services, I will send. Jenkins, show these people out."

"Sir, we have no wish to intrude upon you," Mr. Latimer replied, as he took a chair, and waved his hand to the butler, to close the door; "and indeed we need not do so, if you will withdraw. But under the late earl's will, it is our duty, to see to the safety of all his effects, before the preparation of the inventory. We shall, therefore, proceed to seal up all keys, papers, jewels, plate, and such like, and place a trusty person in possession, until we can communicate with his lordship's son. If he declines to come forward, and desires that you should continue in the agency, we shall take his instructions to that effect in writing, and gladly place everything under your charge."

"What an old fool you are," said Gaston, opening his square jaws, with a haughty grin, "to throw up a lucrative connection thus! If you had played your cards with any skill, I might have continued you in the business, slow and stupid as you are. What's the good of coming here with that old will, made at the death of the boy, months ago? Under this later will, I am sole executor; and all is left to my discretion. There now, what do you think of that, my friends? Fie, fie, what are lawyers come to?"

"Sir, we are come, to do our duty; according to the best of our belief. If you hold a will, of the purport you describe, duly executed, and of later date than the 5th of the present month, we have no more to say; except that we shall scrutinise it closely, because it is at variance with our instructions. Otherwise, this is the last, and therefore the only valid will, of our lamented client.

You will see the date; the fifth day of September, anno domini, 1840. It is brief, and certainly somewhat curt, and bald, deficient perhaps in that fulness of language, which a legal education alone can impart. Nevertheless most creditable to a layman"—Mr. Latimer bowed to Mr. Snacks—"and as valid a will, as I have ever yet had the honour of perusing."

"Let me see it." George Gaston's high colour had ebbed, to the tint of the paper of the will.

"Don't let him touch it;" cried Snacks prematurely.

"Under correction," Mr. Latimer said gently, with a bow of repression, to the lay-minded Snacks; "my duty is not to permit the original to quit my possession, however briefly. But we have prepared two copies; one of which my valued partner, Mr. Emblin, will have great pleasure in handing to you. Perhaps you will peruse it, and inform us, whether you have anything of later date."

Mr. Emblin lifted his long form, and grimly smiling held forth a sheet of draft paper, headed, "Copy of the will of the Right Honourable Earl Delapole, etc., etc., bearing date Sept. 5th, 1840."

Gaston glanced at it, took its meaning in a moment (because it was not a lawyer's work) and quelling his rage by a desperate effort, made the last cast of audacity.

"Really, gentlemen," he said, "perhaps the best thing will be, to call in some one else; some one quite neutral, and not a mere lawyer. The poor old earl's mind was so vacillating lately, and designing people plied him so—that Tubbs for instance, who goes in, I see, for £1000 in this document,—that it seems to me only too probable, that none of these wills will hold water. I believe that mine—I will not be quite certain, for I knew not that the date would be so important,—is two days subsequent to this of yours. His lordship rallied; and his mind improved. He again perceived, who was his real mainstay; and he remembered the baseness, and cruelty of his son. It matters but little to me, you are aware; for my position in any case, is a mere trusteeship. His lordship has not made me the heir, even of the little he could dispose of. The bulk of the property is in settlement. Only I feel perhaps a little goaded, at the idea of being kicked out (after so many years of confidence), through the intrigues of a woman like this Tubbs. It was probably Tubbs, who got this will made. She has long lived apart from her husband, if she has one; and his lordship was given to gallantry."

Here was a new light shed upon the subject. Mr. Gaston saw, that he had made a hit, and folded his arms, for his words to soak

in ; while he was trying to remember whether there would be any chance, of shifting snugly the date of the will, under which he was the master.

Lawyers generally perpend—to use a word of their own—towards that solution of a problem, which involves the lower view of human nature. Moreover, there always is among them, an inclination for old channels, a desire to treat still, through, or with, the "party," through, or with, whom, they have treated hitherto, and a hovering doubt about loss of good connection, by siding with the powers not established yet. Mr. Latimer looked at Mr. Emblin, and that loyal partner returned his gaze. But suddenly Mr. Snacks cut in.

"Gentlemen," he said, "it cannot be pretended, that I have any interest in this case. Mr. Gaston has proposed to call a third party in, to settle something about dates. Well, here am I, a third party fair enough ; able to put down twenty thousand pounds, and without twenty pence in question here. Also, although but a layman, able to make out the date upon any document, in the English writing of the present day. If this good gentleman doubts about his dates, (which are apt to go out of the best head, in trouble,) let him put the other will in my hands ; and I will very soon tell you, which is the correct card. He spoke of it as being in his pocket now ; or at any rate he tapped his coat over it. And if he will hand it to me,—why there, we need have no more trouble."

"Sir, it is a sensible, and frank proposal," Mr. Latimer replied, with some relief ; "and if Mr. Gaston meets it frankly, we will abide by the issue, for the present ; at least as regards the present custody of effects."

But Mr. Gaston would not meet the challenge ; for the very good reason that he could not. It would take him some hours, at least, to shift the date, and bribe the two attestants.

"All this sounds very well ; but it is not business," he said, with all his ancient arrogance. "It is more like child's play, than sound legal sense. I stand here alone, without any legal aid ; and I will ask Mr. Latimer, and Mr. Emblin, as experienced men of law, whether a trustee, placed as I am, in great responsibility, would be doing his duty, by assenting to such a hugger-mugger style of slap-dash. Gentlemen, you know that I am no lawyer. I am acting entirely in the interest of others. And I might have a bitter account to render, if I took another step, without legal advice. There is no advice, that I should prefer, if the question were my own, to that of the learned firm here present. But they are precluded, by their position, from giving me their valuable counsel now. I hope to

have recourse to them hereafter, and probably large dealings with them, as his lordship's habitual advisers. For the moment, however, I must ascertain, from other sources, what my duty is. I have realized, by years of honest labour, a sufficient competence to make this matter one of supreme indifference to me. But acting for others, I must do my best; and I shall not flinch from an unpleasant duty."

"Gammon!" said Mr. Snacks, or began to say it; but was requested to reserve his observations.

Then Mr. Latimer, after a little quiet conference with his partner, arose, and spoke decisively. "We have no wish to take you by surprise, Mr. Gaston, or to force your intentions from you. We will gladly meet any one appointed by you, and consider his views, in an amicable spirit. Neither do we entertain any idea of 'kicking you out'—as you rather strongly put it. On the contrary, we hope for your good-will, to which we shall have some claim, by relieving you from onerous, and unprofitable work. Our course is clear; and nothing, except the production of a will, superseding this, can make our duty doubtful. We will not, for the present, remove your seals, but simply place our own beside them—a duplicate security, so to speak—and it will help us much, to follow your suggestions of value, by noting what articles you have sealed. Our senior clerk, who was out on business, will be here by this time, and will do the manual part, and remain in charge, until further instructions. If you will come round with us, so much the better; or send with us any one you think fit. You clearly understand, that we must do our duty; and no sensible man can take offence at that."

While the senior partner spoke, Mr. Emblin fingered the little golden horse-shoe, in his white cravat—which was all the gamesomeness he dared to carry about him in office-hours—and fixed his eyes as keenly upon Gaston, as if he were the Derby, or a great sculling match. Also, Mr. Snacks was regarding him, as sharply as if he had been a share-list. And Gaston detested to be stared at.

"How much more of this?" cried he, with his furious temper leaping forth his eyes, and his broad face in a blaze again; "you are taking a little too much upon yourselves, with some dirty paper, you have forged. Quips, and quirks, and Does and Roes, and d——d rogues all the lot of you. I'll tell you what I'll do, to settle it. I'll kick out you two thieves myself; and fetch up a scullery-wench, to put out this old ass, with the shoe-paste, who is too weak

for me to handle. Pull up your coat-tails, you two sneaks; and give me a fair run at you."

"Try it with me first;" said Mr. Emblin, calmly. He was not a weak man, though of slighter build than Gaston.

"Allow me first honour," cried the ever ready Snacks; "here I am, sir; kick me out."

Mr. Gaston could have done it, without much trouble, and began to make a mad charge at him. But suddenly, his face turned purple-black, his closed fists fell at his side, and his thick red neck could not support his head. Down he fell upon the floor, with a crash that shook the room; the fire of his rolling eyes went out, like a spark from a chimney vanishing; and a gush of bright blood, from mouth and nostrils, dyed the broad plaits of his breast.

"Run for a doctor;" cried Mr. Latimer, "give me that cushion; keep his head up; cut his collar open with your pen-knife. Oh dear, oh dear, what mischief comes of taking the law into one's own hands!"

CHAPTER XLVII.

SHORT MEASURES NEEDFUL.

HOWEVER, on the whole, it seemed at first, as if Mr. Gaston could scarcely have done better, in this risky coil of things, than go off both his head and feet, and become a helpless patient.

Whenever a man is ill, (however he may have earned his illness,) a fount of pity, and good will, arises, in the breasts of all, who are not brutes. Especially, when he is a man of strength and power, that seemed to defy small ailment, people (conscious of their own more common weakness) feel for him kindly, and put off hard measures, with the popular spirit of fair-play.

Mr. Latimer had a most amiable heart; Mr. Emblin, though sharper, was not hard. As soon as the doctor had pronounced, that further excitement must prove fatal, and that nothing but the free flow of blood had saved his patient from a fatal stroke, the lawyers resolved to proceed with their duty, as tenderly as possible. The best room in the house, and all its comforts, were placed at the service of the steward; and every one was to attend to his orders, as if he had been the master still. None of his seals were removed, but those of the firm were placed beside them; and everything was done, as if it still were doubtful, who might be the true executor.

The old earl was buried, with a quiet happy funeral, in the heart of his land, and among the bones of his forefathers. All the servants had good mourning, and were ordered to be patient, in the question of their legacies, until the law said, whether they were to have them. Neither did the public, for some days, hear "of the heavy loss it had sustained;" but sustained it, without knowing it.

Although Mrs. Giblets, and her daughter Mary, were beginning to pack up for Exeter, they had bought such a number of things in London, to give to every friend they could call to mind, and to last on the mantel-piece for ever, that Mr. Snacks had to fetch down, from his cock-loft, every ancient port-mantle that would hold together. Mr. Snacks, every morning of his life, declared, that write he would to brother Tucker, that same day, and no mistake. But every day, when he was girt up to do it, Mrs. Snacks implored him, to wait just till to-morrow; it was so inhospitable, and downright unlucky, to write in front of people, who were leaving your own house. She had known a bridegroom, and bride, and a baby, killed by flying against decency so. And that was before those temptations of the Lord, that he was always meddling with, began to boil on gridirons.

Moreover, Mrs. Tubbs held out such hopes of the great things, she could well do now (with purest honesty, and sense of trust) in the way of handy little things; which his poor sainted lordship had a hundred times assured her, that he should have no rest in his grave, if anybody else was to steal, and make away with—and after the way she had been spoken of, assert her right she would, concerning what never had been doubted of hitherto.

Mrs. Giblets, in reply to this, was very careful what she said. She heartily desired a great many things, not only for the mantel-piece, but to set up Mary, in a thirty-pound house of her own, whenever she had sown her wild grass—which is perhaps the feminine of oats—and should come to see that young Jemmy Splinters, of the timber-yard, would make her a good husband. Mrs. Giblets smiled upon Jemmy's suit, for his father was down for Mayor of Exeter, which to her mind was next in county-dignity to the Mayor of Barnstaple. But Mary, as yet, turned her pretty nose up at him; because he had no whiskers. But her mother was confident, that these would come, with the bottles she had seen at the London hairdressers, whereof she had collected a fine store for him; and then Mary, who was reasonable, must give way.

Mr. Gaston entered into none of these niceties of behaviour. Being ordered to keep his head well up (not only in figure of speech,

but of body), he sat in the earl's long cushioned chair—a chair as extinct as pig-tails now. It was a wonderfully easy chair; and a natural mind (however active) would have gone to sleep in it, after so much loss of blood. But Mr. Gaston was not of a nature, that could at all be counted on. Whatever thing he ought to do—not from a moral point of view, but according to analysis, or synthesis, or human diathesis, or anything else, whereby philosophers guide, explain, and actuate human action—that thing was the very last that he would do.

He should now have been thankful (not only as a duty, but as a necessity of nature), to Latimer and Emblin, to Mrs. Tubbs (who brought him up good soup, made with her own hand, little as he deserved it of her), and even to Mr. Snacks, who tried, with a hundred horse-power of charity, to doubt of his villainy, because he was so ill.

But he was not half so ill, as they supposed, and as he wished them to suppose. With the strength of will, which always helped him, and had made him what he was, he fetched his mind back, to meet his troubles, and his bodily power, to be up and doing. There was not a day to be lost, nor an hour to spare; if he hoped to save himself. Any minute, the jump of events might catch him, and the crash of his character bury him. Was he to lie there, and await the stroke; or strike for himself, as he used to do?

His pride in himself, and contempt of mankind awoke, as he thought of his enemies; and he rang for three new-laid eggs, a long glass, and a bottle of Solera. He broke the raw eggs into the big deep tumbler, filled up with wine, and swirling round the mixture, gulped it off, and flung the tumbler at the doctor's bottles.

"I am your lord," he shouted to old Jenkins, who was wondering whether it would kill him; "if you want to escape the workhouse, Jenkins, your only chance is to stick to me."

"Yes, my lord! yes, sir, I should say. I did hear, the last thing was—that you was to have the property."

"Right enough. No doubt of that. Why you know it, you old fool. Who signed his lordship's will but you, last week, at Mr. Foil's desire!"

The old man rubbed his eyes, and thought; and then he said; "I disremember; things go through my head so, now. But I have heard say, that you can't sign, without forfeiting of legacies. And we was told there was £50, old and young, for all of us. Disappointing, after fifty years, sir; disappointing, I do say. But if my three young grandsons gets it, the same as their old granny,

we must try to put up with it, sir, forgetting of the merits of the family. The Lord hath justice in his eyes. Though would a'been a fairer thing to think on—£200 to me, and their share independent."

"So it would be. It is very hard upon you, my old friend, after so many years, and all you have been trusted with. To give Tubbs a thousand pounds, and you fifty, is an insult as well as a robbery. But under the will you signed, there was the power to me, and the order to me, to divide a thousand pounds among the servants, according to my own judgment. And the first thing I should do, would be to pay you down £500; to do whatever you like with."

"Well, sir, I'm sure I don't know nothing. The times is so much against us all. They tell me, it will come to a fight of lawyers; and not a honest soul get a sixpence of it."

"That's a heap of lies. We can keep out the lawyers, and all the pack of robbers round us, and do proper justice to the old retainers, by establishing the rightful will. Why, you must remember signing it, no longer ago than Wednesday week? Call upon your memory, Jenkins; you will have to swear to it. Are they all off now, to the funeral?"

"Yes, sir, all gone. Only three carriages! Why there was six, when the young lord died, and that was called out at, for shabbiness. Nothing is ever done now, as used to be. They asked me to go; but I said, 'no, thank you; not behind less than four horses, to disgrace myself.' Five and thirty miles to travel; and only the hearse, and one carriage, have got four!"

"They will come back by rail. But they won't be here, till six or seven, this evening. I feel better; I shall take a little walk in the garden. Keep the rest of the servants indoors, I tell you."

"Bless my poor old bones, sir, you must never think of doing that! Why, if anything was to happen to you, Mr. Gaston, how should we ever get our money?"

"Don't be nervous, old chap. I am better. I feel as strong as a horse again. Stick by me, and I will stick by you. Jenkins, they want to give me the sack; because I am too honest for them. And they want to do the same with you. Your interest is bound up with mine. We shall beat them. Never fear. You know what thieves those lawyers are. They want to throw it all into Chancery; and then no one gets twopence, except themselves. But they reckon without their host, old boy. Tubbs is gone to the funeral, of course. Tubbs is a spy; and she wants to rob you, and your grandsons, and every one of us. Such things make me ill, to think of. I must go,

for a breath of air. Let no one know, that I have left my room. You get away, and have a bottle of port wine. They never even offered you a glass, I'll be bound. A nice way to conduct a funeral!"

In a few minutes, Gaston, with a large cloak on, and a strong oak stick to lean upon, slipped out of the door in the ivied wall, found a cab, and drove off to Hunter Street, and thence to an alley called 'Bishop's Gardens;' where he knocked at the door of Mr. Foil, a lawyer not too legitimate. That gentleman, with large-viewed discretion, was not to be caught, in his first blush, at home; but gradually came down to that condition, after long mediation of a boy, who could be trusted, because his name was 'Bill Foil.'

"I thought you would never come down; and I have not a moment to waste," said Gaston; "how can you be so hard up as all this?"

"Hospitality! hospitality, my good sir; you can understand it. It has brought down our family to answer their own bell. And yet with my abilities, experience, and character, any day we may go up; any day we may look down upon our enemies."

"Meaning the fools, who have given you credit. Send away that grinning brat of yours; I want to speak to you quietly. Have you any place free from listeners?"

"Rather," said Foil, with a pleasant wink; "you know what my love of silence is—surpassed, my good sir, by my love of nothing, except sterling honesty; of which I regard you as the champion."

"Among the blind, the one-eyed man is king. Your clients are a shady lot, I fear. Well, here we are snug; and let us have no humbug. You remember this will, which you prepared, and attested, together with the shaky old butler, when the earl was in his right mind, and knew his meaning? Thieves have got hold of him since, in my absence, and have made him sign something scandalous. Downright robbery; and honest men should leave no stone unturned to baffle it. I would rather pay a thousand pounds, than knock under to such villainy. Now don't begin to talk about caveats, tedious law-suits, and all that. The remedy is short and simple; if we are resolved to have our rights, and sweep aside wretched formalities. To make a man do what he meant to do; as long as he knew his own poor mind."

"That question will be for a jury, I fear; and it always is a most ticklish one. A thousand pounds is but a drop in the ocean, when we come to fight a will."

"I know that; and the reason is plain—because it goes into so

many pockets. But a thousand pounds in one man's pocket, without a farthing to pay out, and with plenty of legal pickings to come, is enough to make one labour for the right."

"Put it plainly," said Mr. Foil; "What am I to do, for the thousand pounds?"

"As simple a thing as you ever did; and a thing as truly respectable. The will is dated 7th of May; it ought to be 7th of September."

"Well, you are a bold one, Mr. Gaston! Transportation for life is what it comes to, on conviction. And to face it out, with that old Jenkins! Jenkins has no nerve at all."

"All the better for that, you stupid. Jenkins is not certain now. He has no memory; but you have. Remind him of something he did that day; and that will prove it to him. There is nothing like a fine old fool, to baffle the sharpest lawyers. Make an entry in your day-book, under 7th of Sept.—'Prepared, and attested Earl Delapole's will;' and out with the leaf of the 7th of May. It will not take them by surprise; for I have prepared their minds for it. I told them, when they produced their will, that I had one of later date; and was going to submit it to a lawyer. Enter my visit to you to-day—'Mr. Gaston, to consult me about the recent will.' Make me a copy, to flourish before them, with the date Sept. 7th. I shall not let them have it in their hands. They will take it for the original; it will be in the same handwriting; and when they come to see the real thing, they will believe, and I shall swear, that it never has been out of my possession; unless they stole it, while I was ill. You know plenty of fellows, who can take out ink, without a sign. Make one of them do it, upon something else, for a test of skill: and steal some of his stuff. Don't let him see the will, of course. Nothing can be easier; and you see, the date occurs but once."

"The cash is not sufficient, to sustain one's conscience, in a task like this. There may be justice in it; but her scale must have more weight than that."

"I knew that you would try to drive me. But remember that, happen what will, not an acre of the land will ever come to me. All that is in settlement, and goes with the title. Why, if I get my rights, you must know as well as I do, it will scarcely come to fifteen thousand; including the old house, which is unsettled. I will give you ten per cent.; fifteen hundred that will be; five hundred, as soon as we can get probate, and the balance as soon as I realise. And here—you can have fifty on account, for expenses."

This, as Gaston knew well enough, proved the most tempting bait of all. To a man who lives from hand to mouth—which is the true way to taste things, and to lick one's fingers deliciously—the ninepence on the nail is more than the noble in the neighbourhood. Mr. Foil put his hand out ; and the rest was a question of detail.

"Only one thing must be certain. Without one assurance, I do nothing," said Foil, at the end of a longish talk, "and that is that the new man must not turn up. If once he gets to London, all is over. He lives in some outlandish part, and he has not heard of these things yet ; according to your account of him. If once he appears, it is all over with one's desire to do justice. The lawyers will be as keen as cats, in their obsequiousness to him. I know what a difference it makes, when a man attends to his own work. All will be sifted ; nothing will pass muster. Seals will be broken, accounts pried into, dates raked up, and the deuce knows what. Their place is to fetch him, without losing a day. And how do you know, that they have not done it ? You may find him in the house, when you get home now."

"No fear of that. I have masked him well," Mr. Gaston answered, with an easy smile. "Those old fools may have tried to find him out ; and find him out, in the end, they must. But it won't be done in a day, I can assure you. I can promise you at least a week, without him."

"A week is not enough ; nor yet a month. You know how slowly the law moves. It is not himself, that we need fear ; for, from all that you say, he is an idiot. But it is the effect, that his presence would have. You know all about him. You must contrive to keep him away, for at least three months. Nothing can keep him from the land, and the title. But if we get probate, we may snap our fingers at him, as regards the part that concerns us. You can realise everything, and be off."

"My good fellow," said Gaston roughly ; "leave that part of the affair to me. Brace up your mind, and this little document, to the correct chronology. I will take this copy, with the proper date upon it ; and expect you with the real thing, to-morrow. Then I shall place you as my agent in possession, and set off westward, to confront the foe. I feel quite confident of defeating all their tricks, crafty humbugs as they are. Now keep yourself stiff. Do your work, and earn your money. That has always been my rule in life."

He got into a cab, and was enraged to hear a nasty buzzing in his ears, a sound as of a hive of bees, at sunset, after a busy

August day. "Pest upon the doctor. His filthy drugs fizz in my brain. He has made me like an old jakes of eighty. If it were not for that beastly Devonshire job, I would sham for a week, and they would dare touch nothing. Ha, a fine idea! With young Mills to help me, and Sarah, and old Jenkins, I might be gone three days, before they found it out; and three days ought to cook his goose for him. Think, think, think! Dash me, if I can think! I must have a flip to my system."

Returning to his room unseen—for some of the servants were gone to the funeral, and the rest were drinking their good health—he obtained his flip, in the form of half a tumblerful of Irish whisky; and then with all his colour restored, and even heightened, sat down to consider his urgent condition. He was playing a desperate game, as he knew, and one that required even more of luck, than skill; but either he must play it on, for some stages further, or fly at once, a beggared, and a banished thief.

In the days, when he might have laid up store, from the proceeds of embezzlement, he had spent as fast as he stole, being even more a gambler than a niggard. He had taken time by the forelock now, so far as to seize and hide the cash-box, before the intrusion of lawyers; but fully confiding in his own position, he had not destroyed all the proofs of his robberies; but had sealed up many things, and so got them sealed against him, into which he should rather have dipped his fingers. Mr. Latimer had left a trusty agent in possession; and Gaston could get hold of nothing for the moment, good enough to run away with, and forego all chance of further booty. Therefore, he must carry on for the present, taking his stand upon, and maintaing the will of which he was executor; until it should come to the test of a law-court; by which time he might be prepared to retire, with competent pickings, if danger arose. Of course, Mr. Foil would never get more than the £50 he had jumped at; unless things went so smoothly, that the proving of the will might pass, without challenge, or by compromise.

First and foremost of all was this—to prevent the arrival of the present earl, alias Captain Larks, alias Mr. Arthur. He might be an idiot, as Mr. Foil had said; but such is the enthusiasm of the English mind, that great people generally may lose their wits, without loss of the worship paid to them. So if Captain Larks now were to march up the big stairs, with a basket of apples on his shoulder—which he was capable (in body and in mind) of doing, and of whistling all the way—every mind, and body, in the house would knock the doors down, with joy, and acclamation, and

my duty to your lordship. For still there lingered among them legendary lore concerning him.

But the wily Gaston—who, but for his violent temper, might have been a first-rate rogue, equal to any of this finer generation—had so contrived things, that Latimer and Emblin (although, no longer ago than last May, they had written to Captain Larks, direct by post, as "L. Arthur, Esquire," and had received—as they supposed—his answer) sent off in the wrong direction now, to find that newly important client. In their books was the copy of their letter, addressed to him at "Christowell, near Exeter," followed by the entry of that very rude reply; a copy whereof had been sent to the old earl, and had driven him to execute that hasty will against him. To Gaston, however, it was undesirable, that they should preserve the correct address, which he had given them for his own purpose; and therefore he had said, "It was a wonder almost that your letter ever found him. Nobody ever calls it 'Christowell,' now; though that may have been the old name of it. 'Carswell' is the pronunciation, and the mode of spelling now in vogue." Upon this, Mr. Latimer, void as yet of all suspicion, had carefully erased, (with penknife and with pounce, in the diligent manner of a fine old firm) the genuine name of that very happy village; and had set it down as "Carswell." Now there are three Carswells (as Mr. Gaston knew, having taken the trouble to find out this) in the region of Devon, round about the loyal city; and perhaps there may be more. At any rate, the missive, or the messenger, would have to exhaust first Carswell proper, which is a hamlet near Honiton, and then King's Carswell, and then Abbot's Carswell, which are in the neighbourhood of Torquay; and when that was painfully done in vain (by means of cross-country lanes, and rough hirings), it would have to be reported, and fresh instructions waited for.

"Meanwhile," thought Mr. Gaston, "short measures are needful. I shall cut down straight, screw Wenlow to the sticking-point at once; and then come back, to meet scandal at my leisure. Who cares what is done in those wild parts? That gardener must be sent to the garden of Eden. The people in the distance, the far-off cousins, are a poor lot, who will jump at their good luck, and be easy enough to handle."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A STROKE OF BUSINESS.

It is all very well, for strong-willed people, to stand up for their rights, and to kick against their wrongs, and to shove the world out of its way, to get their own. But how much more worthy of consideration (and therefore how much less likely to get it) are they, who being of a weak-willed sort, rejoice in the joys of the good folk around them, and soothe their own woes, with the woes of others!

Dicky Touchwood was under urgent orders, to render himself up, on Monday morning, without more clothes than he could put upon his back, to the driest of all the dry-salters of Plymouth, Mr. Growgray of Stonehouse Wall. Dicky had neither strong mind, nor strong will, nor anything else very strong about him; except the desire to be pleased, and as an echo (weaker, but generally on the premises, when the weather permitted it) a desire to please all who pleased him; and the echo's main refrain was, "Beer—beer, after the rain, and beer again—let nobody ask for beer, in vain."

This form of sympathy is perhaps of all sympathies the noblest. It touches a key—the tap-key perhaps—of the human system, which frees the best fluid, and speeds the quickest thrill, through the human barrel, up to its oral vent-peg. When it was reported, at Touchwood Park, before service-time on Sunday, that Squire Dicky was to be turned out, and sent into a bacon-shop—for that was what it came to—there was not a man, and much more a woman, in, or around the park, and belonging to it, who did not cry scandal, and get up before eleven A.M. to behold it.

Dicky was the hero of the day, and felt it. Instead of withdrawing from the public gaze, he put on his brighest apparel, and went to church, with some fine independent farmers, who cared not a snap for Sir Joseph. "We'll see you through it, sir; you keep your back up," was the comfort and the counsel, he received on every side; and several young ladies, who had thought him "rather fast," longed to kiss him in the absence of witnesses.

"Am I to be debarred from my own son?" Lady Touchwood asked, with concentrated essence of pathos, in her voice, and eyes. "Shall he be torn from my arms, before I have fitted up his dressing-case? Oh, Sir Joseph, you are a wilful man, and you always have your own sad way! But reflect, I implore you; ponder, I implore you, the results of this sudder, and outrageous whim."

"It is not sudden; and it is no whim. I have had it in my mind,

for months. You know nothing of the circumstances. The boy wants pulling down ; we all want pulling down ; and now we shall have it, with a vengeance. To-morrow, I shall see the auctioneer, about selling this place, this gilded millstone round my neck, which has been the ruin of me ; and off we go into lodgings at Plymouth."

"After all we have done, to be a credit to you !" Her ladyship burst into a wild flood of tears. Through all the hot weather, she had kept her temper, in her daughter's absence, so that she scarcely knew herself ; and this was all the reward she got ! But Sir Joseph had nothing more to say. He had put on the shabbiest clothes, he could find—and he had some of most friendly shabbiness—although it was Sunday, and he ought to go to church, at least once, for the sake of example. He treated his partner in life to a sniff, which meant, "You may cry away, as long as it amuses you ;" and then he walked off to his own little room, and locked himself up, with some cash-books he had brought.

"He may starve, if he likes ; but you don't catch me at it," Squire Dicky exclaimed, when his sister brought him word, that the table was not to be laid for dinner ; "I suppose he's broke at last. I have always been expecting it ; and that has made me so thrifty. I heard an old chap at Cambridge say—'chousing, and carousing, leads to out-housing,' and we shall all have to turn out to-morrow. Not that we have had much carousing, however. What blunt have you got to begin the world with, Judy ?"

"I am not going to tell you," his sister answered ; "you'd get it all out of me, and spend it, before the shops were open."

"Well, I'll tell you what to do. Marry old Short, and make a crib for us. I don't approve of the 'wide, wide world.' And a dry-salter I never will be ; I never will be a dry-salter ; sooner would I lose my liberty, by putting my neck into a halter. There, I made that in church to-day, with the ladies admiring my waistcoat. Not so dusty, for your most obedient !"

"Adversity will indeed have sweet uses, if it fetches your slang out of you. But in reward for your brilliant stanza, I will invite you to dinner to-day. In my room at six o'clock. Mother will be there. She has been crying so, and she looks so poorly, that I cannot ask your friend. He must think he has fallen among strange people, to get no dinner for two days."

"Not he ! He is a gentleman, and regards it as one of the many ups, and downs, of trade. He knows, that we are only tradespeople, and must dine upon the counter, when the business is pressing. I have told him that we always do it, when the ships are sailing, for

fear of his being uncomfortable. He says that he enjoys it ; but he must be off this evening, by the mail from Ashburton."

"If there is anything I detest," Miss Touchwood answered, with a tranquil brow, "it is to hear of trade continually. Trade is such a low thing ; commerce is the proper word ; and even that has nothing lofty in it. Make your friend understand, before he goes (if so stupid a gentleman can understand) that my father has nothing to do with either trade, or commerce ; but is simply and solely, a government contractor, moving in a very wide circle, discharging duties of the first magnitude, and commanding European confidence."

"I had better chalk it up, to have it right this time. I'll tell him all that, on the way to the coach ; and then at the tail of it, I shall stick in, 'but the governor's busted up now, and must go back to the apron he began with, in the lollipop shop at Plymouth.'"

"There will not be any dinner in my room to-day." Miss Touchwood spoke with dignity ; and departed, to preserve it.

That stern announcement compelled the young squire, to hasten to his mother's room ; which he had shunned, all day, through terror of maternal outburst. But now he must try hard to get dinner, both for himself, and for his guest, who was being dismissed so curtly. And in that just enterprise he succeeded, to and beyond his warmest hopes ; for her ladyship, having allowed herself to be trampled on so shamefully, was now in the growing tumult of recovery, and reaction.

"Sir Joseph is master of the dining-room," she said, after bedewing her son, with one of the last tears left in her system ; "in all high circles, the master of the house is the master of the dining-room. But feminine,—or perhaps rather I should say, according to the way in which you look at it—masculine licence stops there, my dear. Good society has always maintained, as one of its first rules of existence, that the drawing-room is the ladies' realm. There they may do anything they like, among themselves, without being interfered with. They may lock the doors, they may play pianoforte, they may order up anything from the cellar, that—that they can get the keys to. When your father built this house—and I am sure, I wish that he had never done it, to be a 'millstone round his neck,' and to turn us, neck and crop, out of it—I took the trouble to buy a book, laying down the laws about great people, their rooms, and their dress, and their habits of feeding, and the way they behave to one another, and to the people they have nothing to do with. I knew it all, well enough, being of a highly respectable

family myself, my dear ; as you may find yet, if your poor father goes to prison ; but it is a great point to have anything printed, because it must be impartial. Therefore, I shall order you some dinner in the drawing-room, and come myself to see you eat it ; and you will be welcome to bring in that large young man from Trinity—this trouble has driven his name out of my head—I mean, of course, the one whose bottles your dear papa kicked over."

This was managed well ; and Julia, proud but not relentless, came ; and the large young man from Trinity, sighed, according to his magnitude, whenever he could sigh aside. For not only was he large, but tender ; and the pricks of the barb, that were meant to sting him, had acted as with a good rumpsteak—they had only made him sweeter. But feeling that he had no money, he sighed behind his handkerchief. Julia gave him several glances, in her well experienced style, soft, and rich, and to be cherished ; so that his heart might ache quite nicely, when he was a hundred miles away.

Lady Touchwood saw all this, and thought that her daughter should not be so cruel, even on a Sunday ; the best day of the seven by rights ; but the worst in fact of cruelty. For then, do schoolboys bully most ; then do men most beat their wives ; and then are all the great battles fought. And then Sir Joseph Touchwood raged, because he had little else to do.

When Dicky came home, in a gloomy mood, after seeing the last of his friend and hero, his mother watched for him, and found time to say a few words privately. "You are ordered to go away, to-morrow ; and you must show obedience. Your father is in a very dreadful state ; through some heavy losses. He cannot be contradicted now ; and I have borne with him, like an angel. But as for your going to that dry-salter, it shall never be, while I have breath. Bring me the bag you put your beer in, for your sporting expeditions, the one you strap across your back ; and I will put you up some things. And then you shall have a good hot breakfast, and set off for Christowell, before your father comes downstairs. I have written a letter to Mr. Short, begging him to be most careful about the airing of your bed. I have asked him to ride over here, as early as ever he can do it, and to come in by the stable-way. He will comfort me ; he always does, because he knows my nature ; and I shall endeavour to make him useful, as he always likes to be. It would not do to write it down ; but you might say (if he should happen to ask) that poor Julia is in great distress, and has no one to rely upon."

Smelling a rat, as he coarsely put it to himself, the young man

obeyed, and on the Monday morning knocked at the vicarage door, with his knapsack on, when the parson was sitting down to breakfast. "Well done! We shall have an earthquake now," said Mr. Short, as Dicky marched in, with some contempt for people, who were just come down to breakfast; "in the name of wonder, what has made a lark, of such a lie-a-bed?" Then Dicky sat down, and told his tale and produced his mother's letter. In an hour's time, before Sir Joseph had his sulky meal upstairs, Parson short was holding council with the lady of the house. "I have no real friend, but you; and you always know what to do," she added, after full detail of woes.

The vicar knew little of commercial matters, and even less of heavy contracts, handled like a balanced pole, which may crack the operator's skull. But having shrewd sense, and more doubt of Sir Joseph's truth, than of his skill, he thought it most unlikely that the great contractor had lost his balance, beyond all recovery. "It is but a trick of his," he thought, "to get out of some bad job." But he could not say that, to Sir Joseph's wife.

"It will all come right; depend upon it, with patience, it will all come right." He smiled as he spoke, for Lady Touchwood's faith in his wisdom was amusing. "But what can I do, without the risk of fatal offence to Sir Joseph? He is not the man to put up with any meddling by—by a stranger almost to him, although an old friend of yours, and eager to be of any use to him."

"No," said the lady; "I quite see that. Nobody would think of meddling with him. But it might be possible perhaps to ascertain what the public opinion is about it."

Public opinion had not yet arrived at its present condition of debility, when it goes with the pull of some sledge-dog journals, or the push of the man who can swear the hardest. Therefore Mr. Short did not disdain it; but asked—"where is it to be got?"

"Only in Plymouth," said Lady Touchwood, "and I can't bear to think of such a thing."

"Of such a thing as my going to Plymouth? Why, what is that for *Trumpeter?* About two-and-twenty miles, by the Post-bridge road; and he can have three hours' rest, while I lounge about, and call upon some friends. I know a man who knows everything about the business-people—I mean the highest mercantile circles—and without an inkling of my object, I can learn—you will understand."

"Whether my husband is bankrupt, and the roof over our heads our own, or not. Oh, Mr. Short, what a blessed, happy, thing it

is, to be in the Church of England! There you can do what you like; you have your own parsonage, and your own opinions, and your own time to do nothing. Everybody looks up to you; and you go out in the morning, to see what the people are about; or not to see it, if you don't like. You order your dinner, and they send you presents; and you think how much work you have done! No wonder you are wise; no wonder you can advise poor women well."

The parson laughed; though he could not think that this description of his duty did fair justice to his trials, and earnest labours to be master of the parish. But he knew that nothing can change a lady's opinion upon great subjects (any more than it can upon little ones), and so he slacked *Trumpeter's* curb three links, for a long day's work, and mounted.

"This is a new turn of things, and a very nasty one to my mind," he thought, as he struck from a bridle-lane, up a combe, into the old Roman road; "who can make either head, or tail, of the things that may come out of it? That I should be put to discover the state of Sir Joseph's affairs, for his wife's satisfaction! I should have declined such a ticklish errand. It will require the greatest tact, and what I detest—some subterfuge. But he must be almost a brute, to keep his own wife and children, in the dark. He is playing some deep game, and recks not a rap, how wretched he makes them, to suit his own ends. Perhaps my first impulse, was right; but now, right or wrong, I must go through with it. Go along, *Trumpeter;* we are on a smooth road now."

The worthy horse put his best foot foremost, for his spirit was willing, and his flesh not weak; so that they were both in Devonport, ere the dockyard-men streamed forth to dinner; which is a date of the day to be trusted, for rapid punctuality. Then the parson, having seen his horse in comfort, and kindly receiving nourishment, called upon a quiet man, a Christowellian, own cousin to Mrs. Aggett's relicks—as she called her dear dead husband—and now rising steadily into social excellence, as a widely esteemed ship's chandler. His name was Codd, and he was mounting into such a sphere of wholesale merit, that he was beginning to nod to Sir Joseph, instead of touching his hat to him, and had even shaken hands with him, at Christmas times. But he did not pretend to be on a par with the vicar of the parish he was born in.

"Servant, sir," he said to Mr. Short, touching his forelock, like a Sunday-school boy; "glad to see 'e, once again, sir. And how are all the good folk up to home, like?"

"Pretty well, considering the long dry weather. I never saw the moor so parched before. Our people say, that Colonel Westcombe's grouse have done it. But I want a little talk with you, Master Codd."

Codd was a simple, straightforward fellow, getting on slowly, by dint of downright honesty, attention to business, and heed of ancient maxims. Mrs. Codd (who had been a housemaid at Lustleigh, wooed by Codd with his apron on) happened to be upstairs, engaged in the periodic increase of an honest race; and so there was freedom of tongue, and of ears.

"I hope you may be wrong," said Mr. Short, as soon as he had heard the other's story, which came without any questions, for the subject was hot, that day, in Plymouth; "and I cannot help thinking you must be wrong. Sir Joseph Touchwood, after all his years of dexterity, and of experience, should be about the last man in the kingdom, to break up suddenly, as you describe."

"Well, sir, I only know what I hear tell; and I heartily hope it may be wrong. Many a poor head will ache, and many a poor belly quag, if it is so bad as they tell me. And I am sorry for the poor folk round our parish. Sir Joseph hath found work for a sight of 'em, in the winter-time; so the people tell me. He mightn't be altogether honest; but he hath been honourable. And if he hath failed, you may say for certain, he hath failed respectably."

"That means for a big lump of money. The morals of trade are wonderful. Tell me, Codd, since it is town-talk now, where I shall have the best chance of correct particulars."

Mr. Codd told him; and the parson, with excitement most unusual with him (because he was full of things larger than money), hastened to the gentleman, who knew all about it, according to his own belief, and that of all the public. This gentleman was not inclined however to impart the smallest decimal of his knowledge; until Mr. Short spoke very plainly to him, and declared that he was likely to be involved in it. It then became the duty of the business-man, to come down with the truth, to the utmost of his knowledge; and the parson thanked him, and went to fetch his horse.

Then his horse fetched him, at such a pace (because he was on the homeward road, and his shoes were got into wearing) that it was not dark to a clear-eyed man, when the parson of Christowell pulled the bell of the great front-door of the Touchwood house. "I want to see your master himself," he said. "You can't see Sir Joseph, sir, I fear, just now. He is not very well to-day, and he keeps his room." "Then let me see him in his room. I simply

insist upon seeing him. Show me where he is, without any message."

The man obeyed, for he held Mr. Short in some awe, for various reasons; and presently the vicar was face to face with the great contractor, in his private room.

"Mr. Short? Ah!" Sir Joseph spoke mildly, after closing his mighty oak desk with a bang, to indicate sense of intrusion. "Important business, Mr. Short?"

"That depends entirely upon how you take it. You may think me troublesome, but not, I trust, impertinent, when you have heard what I have to say."

"Sit down, and say it, my good sir. You are the last man to be impertinent."

"Very well. You are a man of business, Sir Joseph; and so am I, in my little way. To-day I happened to be in Plymouth"—Mr. Short coloured, at this highly-coloured version of the fact—"and there I heard things which grieved me. I heard that your firm, the first in the West of England, was in difficulties"

"Oh, they say that, do they? Very well; supposing it to be so, we are not in your debt, that I am aware of."

"No, you owe nothing to me. But I owe something to you, after many years of hospitality and kindness. And now you can do me another kindness, by letting me make a good investment. I have long been looking for a sound investment for £25,000, which came to me about two years ago. If I may place it, at fair interest with you, I shall be under a deep obligation."

"What you mean to say is, that you will have placed me under a deep obligation."

"I mean what I say. I have perfect confidence in your sagacity, and enterprise. I know that the sum which I mention is nothing in vast affairs, such as you conduct. But I wish to secure for myself a good chance; however selfish it may be of me. If you think five per cent. too much——"

"Fifty per cent. would not be enough for money invested in a falling house. Sir, you have made me very grateful to you, for your faith in me, and most friendly offer. I shall never forget it, while I live; for not one of my best friends has come to do it. But I am happy to tell you, Mr. Short, that, although I have suffered serious loss, my business is as good as ever; and I can put a guinea on the top of every shilling I owe in the world. I tell you this, in strict confidence; for I wish to alarm my own family. It is high time to stop their most reckless profusion, and to pull them up sharply

upon their marrow-bones. I have not said a word, that they can lay hold of; I have left both them, and the public, to form their own opinions, about my affairs; because it suits me, at this time, that both should be certain of my bankruptcy. Concerning the public, I will not tell you why, though it is a legitimate enterprise. But concerning my family, you know as well as I do, that they winnow my gatherings on every wind of whimsy. I have pulled them up, and I shall keep them so; if you respect my secret. It was my good wife, who sent you to Plymouth. Tell her exactly, what you heard there."

Mr. Short was a little surprised, and showed it. He thought that he had got away most cleanly, on his Plymouth expedition, and accomplished it most cleverly. But here was the subject of it, looking at him, as if he had been the ordaining cause. Sir Joseph smiled, and took the upper hand again.

"Tell her exactly what you heard; and let her have a night of it. I have had many a night of tossing, with the way they have scattered my substance. It is time for them to have a turn. I have not let even my daughter know. A man may be blown up with a ton of powder—such as I have just got on my books—and the women don't care what becomes of his pieces, if they can only pick his pocket up, with money for their laces, and ribbons in it. Short, you are very wise, to be a settled bachelor. Good-bye; I shall bear in mind your kindness though."

Mr. Short disliked that reference to his present domestic condition; for if anything had moved him beyond the lines of prudence, to the tune of a quarter of a plum, surely it was not misogyny.

But Sir Joseph shook his hand, more cordially than he had ever done before, and looked at him, with a deep gleam of heart in his well-worn eyes, so hard in general, and so bound in business vellum.

"Henceforth, that man is my steadfast friend," thought the parson, as he went downstairs; "also he thinks highly of me, for having so much cash to spare. But my part is difficult, none the less. I must not allow it to be imagined—and then there is this puzzle, about poor Dicky. Ah, Lady Touchwood, well met indeed! I was coming to look for you quietly."

Her ladyship thought he had just arrived, for she saw his horse, led to and fro by a groom. "Come in, and tell me all," she said; "I can bear the worst, better than this suspense."

Being bound by her husband's confidence, he could tell her only what they said at Plymouth. But seeing her deep distress, he could not help adding some words of comfort.

"You know that I do not say things rashly; I am sure, that all this is grossly magnified by malice and envy. You will see Sir Joseph rise above it, like a lion, or rather perhaps an eagle, and it will have done good to your spirited son, to be restricted for a while in cash, and credit, and sportive joys. I will feed him, as well as he ought to be fed, in the proper course of dry-salting; and I will borrow a gun, having only one left, and walk him off his legs with *Nous*. He shall stay with me, till this little breeze is over; for I am not afraid of Sir Joseph."

"You are the best friend I have ever had. How could I compare Captain Larks to you? But do please to see that my darling boy puts his feet in hot water, for half an hour, every time he wets them. Oh, Mr. Short, you do manage people so, how I wish you had Julia to keep in order?"

"Ah," said the parson, with a bright blush on his fair well-nourished countenance; "that is a happiness too high for me. But I would try to be equal to it, Lady Touchwood."

CHAPTER XLIX.

CRANMERE.

"'Tis a terrible rough road, sir," said the famous Mr. Perrott, of Chagford, not then so widely known as now, but already called 'the Dartmoor-guide,' "or rather I should say, no road at all, after you be past Kestor rocks. But you can't miss the way, without a fog comes on; if you go according to my directions."

"Thou art very accurate; and I am not a fool. After passing Kestor, I see Watern tor, about two miles to the west, the one with the hole in it, which thou sayest a man of great stature can ride through. When I get there, I go south-west, and cross the Walla brook, as thou hast called it, and then over some rough ground, to another little stream, which is the head-water of the Taw, and then over a hill, to Cranmere pool."

"You've got it as right as can be, sir; but you can't get to Cranmere very well on horseback, even now that the bogs be down so. In the winter-time, 'tis a bad job afoot; without you know the ground as I do. But now, if you go heedful, there isn't much to risk; for the oldest man never knew the moor to be dried up so. All the black places are safe enough now; for the crust is firm on the top of them. And wherever the rushes grow, you can step

freely ; but you must have a care of the bright green moss ; for it won't hold a dog up, let alone a heavy man. But you better let me come with you, sir, though I am not very fond of Sunday jobs. You may be within a score landyards of Cranmere, and never find 'un after all. I've known a party beat about the hill all day, and come home, and swear there was no Cranmere."

"Spare me that rubbish, friend ; unless thou art afraid, that this queer-looking horse of thine will break down."

"*Charlie* break down ! Not unless you throw him. *Charlie* will travel three-score miles a day, without bit or sup. He is true forest-breed. Only you put him up, where I told you. But mind you one thing. No weather won't hurt *Charlie ;* but it may hurt you, sir. And to my mind, the weather will break up, before the day is out. The sky was all red in the east, last night ; and the moon lay as flat as a frying-pan. 'Tis eight o'clock now ; you should be there by eleven, allowing for roundabouts, and bad travel ; be back here by three o'clock, if you can sir."

The elderly gentleman, in outward semblance (who had slept last night at the *Three-crowns* Inn, and hired Mr. Perrott's best horse for the day), set off, without answer, at a good round trot ; with the murky morning sun behind him, and the heavy dry air slowly waving the silvery locks, beneath his broad-brimmed hat. "Queer sort of a Quaker, to my opinion," the shrewd Perrott muttered, as he went back to breakfast ; "I have heard say, that they take no heed of Sunday ; but never, till now, that they can put away six rummers of hot brandy and water, in a hour and a half."

That spirited explorer, Mr. Gaston, who had accomplished this feat last night, and now looked the soberest of the sober, rode on apace to the bridge across South Teign, and then through Teigncombe, to the foot of Kestor, where all road failed him, and the wild moor lay around. Then he pulled off his hot Quaker hat, and hotter wig (both of which he had bought at Exeter) and hiding them in a deep tuft of bracken, at the foot of a tall rock, which he would know again, wiped his warm, forehead, and used hot language, concerning the state of the weather. For the glare of the scorched earth rose, like a blister, and the coppery clouds compressed it ; and the sparkle of splintered and powdered granite, like glistening needles, pricked the eyes. Mr. Gaston's face came forth in spots, as his mind came out in tainted language ; for which there is no space, but gaps. Then he drew from his pocket a folded cap, to cover his tawny cropped head from flies, and getting upon *Charlie*, set forth again.

His landmarks were plain, and far too plain ; as he might have known, if he had ever cared for nature. The delicate haze of fair-set weather (which had mantled the hills, for weeks and weeks, till the power of the sun dispersed it), was gone altogether, and the soft gaze of distance was shortened into a hard near stare. To the north, and west, the beetling slabs, and jags, and juts, of many a pile (Steperton, Mill-tor, Yes-tor, High Willhays, and others shouldering under them) seemed scarcely half a mile away, so clear was every seam and scrag. To the left, as he trudged up Okement hill, having left his horse in an old peat-hut, he could see the dark bulk of Fur-tor, the most lonely and dismal of all the moor, which even John Sage might tremble to approach, in the very bravest sunshine ; for this is the haunt of the fiercest demons, that shriek along the windy waste, or howl in the morasses.

Gaston was rather quick of step, for a man of ripe size, and no feather-weight ; but he found the travelling full of travail, as he sought for "the mother of waters." It is generally supposed (with as much of truth as there is in general opinions) that five rivers have their fountains here ; as if five Naiads could live together. But five get out of the ground, within the space of one square mile, perhaps ; and the earth, in the power of such production, cracks and splits, like a thin-skinned fig. Especially on the eastern side (from which Mr. Gaston was striving to get in), deep black channels, interlacing one another, and lapped with heath, required great outlay of long leaps, or much light downing, and heavy upping, of boots encrusted with the cake of mire. As wearisome a plod, as a light foot can go through with, or a heavy one stick fast in, with much aching of the knee-caps.

George Gaston began to lose courage ; and bad temper took the place of it. His great square jaws began to work, like those of a panting bull-dog ; and his cheeks darkened into the colour of peat-water, where it is suffused with iron ; for his recent illness had left its traces, both upon countenance, and in limb.

And a pestilent thing from his point of view—which may not have been a correct one—was the impossibility of finding any steadfast place to stand upon, for the mighty relief of a cordial swear. If ever he stood still, for that congenial purpose—which *non solvitur ambulando*—his heels began to be infernally absorbed, and his foul tongue was jerked into the roof of his great mouth. Thus was he obliged to hold it well, with hard wear, and tear, of constitution.

Suddenly springing from a channel of black ooze, in a labyrinth of deep gullies, roofed with sedge, and heath, he stood face to face

with a man, who had risen from a bog-seam to the same quivering crest. "Who are you?" cried Gaston, pulling out a big horse-pistol.

"You needn't shoot me," replied the other; "I am only going home, sir, and I won't hurt you."

Ashamed of his flurry, Mr. Gaston muttered something about the notorious robbers on the moor, while he narrowly observed the stranger—a grizzled man, perhaps about fifty years of age, embrowned by the sun, and deeply scarred upon one cheek. He was tall, and active, and straight of figure, and carried a bundle on a ground-ash stick; while he failed not to return, with interest, the inquiring gaze which he received.

"If you know this beastly country," said Gaston; "I wish you would show me where Cranmere is. I must have been hunting for it, at least two hours; and as yet am no wiser than when I began. A bumpkin told me that 'he hideth himself; and so he seems to do, with a vengeance."

"I used to know it well enough," was the answer; "but the ground is so quaggy, that the landmarks shift. However, I dare say, that I can find it; but when you get there, there is nothing to see."

"I wonder who you are? I should be glad to know;" cried Gaston, as he followed, with some trouble, the long light stride of the stranger.

"It may seem an odd thing, sir, but the very same idea came into my mind, about you. Here we are; this is the place, they make a fuss about. Ah, they haven't seen the world, as I have."

Rightly had he said indeed, that there was not much to see there. In spite of the drought, there was water then (which has since disappeared, through some tapping of the peat), but the water was not large enough, to cast any light, or life, around. The only comfort to the heart of the persevering traveller, was that he never henceforth could be, in a more uncomfortable spot.

"Thank you," said Mr. Gaston briskly; "it has fulfilled my expectations. One thing certain in our life is, to find everything misdescribed. The Fleet-ditch, according to my recollections, presents a more striking scene than this. And the smell of dead stuff is less lively here. Good-bye, my fine fellow; don't let me detain you. It is a Sunday morning; and if there is a place that won't let me in, I shall sit down to moralise. Would you like to have anything, for your trouble? Or are you superior to such thoughts?"

Without any answer, his guide departed; being a rough man of

the world, who had learned to form dislikes with swiftness, and to express them slowly. Among the black rifts of the wild, he disappeared, as if he had sunk into the earth ; while Gaston sat down upon a tuft of rusty heath, and his heart became as dismal as the dreariness around. He had worked very hard, and beyond his weakened health, to secure his own purpose—which was good in his own eyes ; and he thought it very hard, that his fortune should have driven him, into a place so lowering. For a resolute man of that sort rejoices in stiff hills, and steep valleys ; but finds no pleasure in a vast expanse, hovering between hill and valley.

The fault of the man was his selfishness, and the narrow pursuance of his own desires. If he had been born about six ranks higher in the social scale, educated to that mark, and taught to tread the marble steps, he might have become an ascending figure, and a statue at the top of them. For the firm set will, tough-fibred heart, power to turn wrong into right, and large readiness to dispense with scruples, adorned by imperious rudeness also, would have made him a popular idol. But having had no start in life, save the push of his own hands and feet, he had lapsed into the crooked ways, whose end is desolation.

Some turn of words in his troubled mind, and the melancholy waste around him (darkening with the heavy gathering of a most peculiar sky) set him perhaps on meditation, a very unusual thing with him. But he shook off that weakness, and returned to his own anxieties.

Lives there a man who can enjoy the grandest of all prospects, with the smallest of all flies in his eye? And in George Gaston's mental eye, were no small perils, disquietudes and pains. In the first place, although he bore some ill-will towards his intended victim, for crossing his path so vexatiously, he had suffered no personal wrong, to give flavour and warmth, to the coming atrocity. Scoundrel, and therefore self-deceptive, as he was ; yet scarcely even to himself could he maintain, that he had any right to take a harmless life, because it interfered with his. He could only put aside that question, and lament the stern necessity which drove him ; and reflect, that a man who could bury himself in such a dismal wilderness, must be happier, out of this world, than in it. Whose doing was it, that he, poor Gaston, was driven, in spite of all his struggles, to this pass? Why, clearly that fellow's, whose selfish cowardice, and wicked dislike of his own flesh and blood, had compelled another to supply his place, and thus fall into this complication.

"How much longer, shall I beat about the bush? The sky is thickening over; there is no time to spare. To be caught in a storm here, would be a frightful thing."

Rising, he shook his heavy shoulders and big neck, for the weight of the drowsy air bowed his head; and then he whistled thrice upon his nails, with a sound like the call of a curlew. In less than two minutes, a rough dark man was striding through the swamp, towards the pool; the style of whose dress was not church-going.

They saluted each other, without much good will, or courtesy of expression; and then the last comer sat down, and crossed his legs, and stared at his visitor complacently.

"You are not at all the thing, my city friend," he said; "you want a course of Dartmoor. London life, gambling, and hot whisky, play old Harry with the constitution. If nature had gifted you with a delicate complexion, what an interesting subject you would be! Come down, and live under the peat with me. Dry, genial, bracing quarters. I will board you for a fortnight, for ten pounds."

"There is no time for rubbish. I am come to know, why you have forsworn yourself."

"There are many legal axioms that might be quoted. A bad oath is honoured by the breach. And again, no man is bound to the impossible."

"What impossibility has there been? That would be the only excuse for you. Unless you can prove that to my satisfaction, things will go badly with you, Master Wenlow."

"Threats become a joke," replied the other, with a smile; "when the threatener is wholly in the power of the threatened one. You have gallantly ventured into the lion's den; and without my permission, you go forth no more. You are covered by a carbine where you sit; and to shoot me, would only bring your own death-shot. Look round as much as you like, George Gaston! but you will not see my noble mate. Now listen to sound reason, and attempt no threats. I went, to carry out my agreement with you. But the man's daughter came between us. Could even you have slain him, in the presence of his child? If you could—take the job out of my hands altogether. Why don't you do so? For the crime is just the same. But I suppose you cannot trust your eyes, like mine."

"I suppose so," returned Gaston, for he wished to skip that question; "at any rate you must do it, quite alone. You must not take that other ruffian with you."

"What ruffian? George Gaston? Oh, I see, you mean my friend, who is watching my interests! No, he knows nothing of this little by-play. He is under a cloud; but he never could bring himself to shoot an honest man; as you, or I, might do. Ah, it is not complimentary! But we don't stand upon such trifles now."

"I am here upon business; and not for stale jocosity. You are entirely outside the world; you have no chance of returning to it, in this stiff little kingdom. I offer you the chance of a new world, where you may start anew, and cultivate your much neglected virtues, rise in position, found a family, and look back upon this boggy period, as no more than a black dream gone by. In exchange for all those blessings, you have simply to remove one worthless life. A life extinguished in disgrace already, tired of itself, and desirous to depart. And what is that to you, who have taken two already!"

Gaston's coarse cynicism foiled itself. Without those last words, he might perhaps have conquered. For the other man was desperate, and well-nigh sunk into that black depth of our nature, in which we scorn our lives, our brethren's, and the will of Him who gave them. But the sense of wrong was vivid in a soul, where the power of right lay prostrate.

"It is a lie, a gross lie!" he shouted, overbearing Gaston with the fury of his eyes, as he pressed down his shoulders with the vigour of his hands. "They died through me. But I did not kill them. If anybody knows the truth, you know it. Without you, none of it would have happened. Gaston, I believed that there was no devil. But when I look at you, I am orthodox again."

"Once more, there is no time for bandying words. You have broken your pledge so abominably, that the fellow is preparing to start to-morrow. If he once gets to London you will rue it, more than I shall. This very day you must carry out the matter. You know his ways, as no one else does. Do it; and be off to-night for Falmouth. There you shall have your passage-money to New York, and five hundred clear, to make your fortune with."

"It cannot be done for the money. Five hundred! A thousand is the very least, that I will hear of."

"It is out of my power. I cannot do it now. Be fair with me, and I will be generous. Five hundred down, and you shall have security for the other five hundred, in six months' time. That will be much better for you, than to have it all at once."

"A thousand thanks for such thoughtful kindness. But now as you have no time to lose, understand me. You say that I have taken two lives already. Very well, that is enough for one lifetime.

My conscience pricks me through your words. I will not commit this murder for you. I have done many bad things; but nothing half so villainous as this. Go, and do it yourself, George Gaston; you may trust my honour not to peach."

"Scoundrel, after all that I have done ——"

"Hard words break no bones, my friend. Pop at me, if you like, but first look round, and see my body-guard, as dead a shot as I am. Mike, stand up. Our friend is pugnacious. Ah, now you are wise; to shoot me would never help you. One word of counsel in return, my friend. I have seen you rather nervous in a thunder-storm. Well, the heaviest and biggest there has been for generations, is gathering in the south-east now. If you are caught upon the moor, and lose your head, you will certainly get bogged; unless the lightning saves the trouble. Farewell, George. We shall never meet again. If I were revengeful, you would not go so."

Without further ceremony, off he walked, and vanished in a shaggy cloof, beside the black morass; while Gaston looked after him, as if he would like to shoot him, but could not yet afford the pleasure

CHAPTER L.

SEEKING REFUGE

ABANDONED thus, in this desert place (the most "unkid," both to see and feel, within the British kingdom), Mr. Gaston lost his temper —or rather found, and gave way to it—for the valuable space of half an hour. He was not weak enough to suppose that powerful language has power upon facts; but he was amply weak enough to find comfort in the free-trade of words, called "swearing." Then his spirit came back to him, much refreshed; and that his bodily strength might tally, he put away one pistol, and pulled out another, whose charge was liquid, and discharged it.

"A flip for the desert, and the bogs, and thunder! This Dartmoor is but a trumpery hole," he exclaimed with the 'Dutch courage' rising. "It is something to have saved a thousand pounds, and to do these ticklish jobs oneself. That cowardly fellow tried to frighten me with thunder. A liar he always was, and will be. Why, the clouds are clearing off!"

Overhead, for the moment, the dull air lifted, and a dirty yellow light streamed down; but before the hope of this grew stronger, a low growl trembled far away.

"Tush! It is those fools firing at Plymouth. Admiral come out of church—or something. They are always making some row there. I will get out of this beastly oven. Two cannon-shot never come into one hole. A man, who has been struck by lightning once, must be free of it, like small-pox. Those fellows who call themselves 'electricians,' are nothing but thundering quacks, after all. How can there be any such thing as special attraction in certain persons? Bah, I don't believe a word of it. Besides, I don't believe there will be a storm at all; and if there is, it will draw to the highest spots like Yes-Tor. George Gaston is not going to be scared for nothing, in this crisis of his fortunes. Forth among the blessed bogs again! I am beginning to understand them."

This sanguine view of the position restored the deep red colour to his cheeks; which lasted for an hour, or more, while he plodded on right stubbornly, over and through the shaggy fen-growth, scorched at the top, and sodden at the bottom. Then he came to a little dark-eyed runnel, stealing from its cradle-head, with tottering uncertainty; and tumbling into little flutters, where it lay, and rested.

"This ought to be the Taw, but I am much afraid it isn't," thought Gaston, pursuing its direction for a minute; "instead of the Taw, it must be the Tavy; and instead of getting near my horse, I must have gone away from him."

A sudden shift of the panting air and wavering light had misled him. For the track of the sun was now lost in the sky, as completely as if he were quagmired; while a flit of tawny haze obscured the coronet of distinctive tors.

In a rage with himself, and the weather, and the world, he turned upon his track at the head of Tavy cleeve, and making a correct landcast this time, found his way to the fountains of the Taw, and so to the peat shed.

Here Mr. Perrott's stout horse, *Charlie*, was getting uneasy about the weather, and had well-nigh jerked his bridle off. With gladness he accepted Mr. Gaston's weight, and set his head towards the Chagford stable. For he was a native of the broad moorland, and inhaled the subtle tissue of the cloud and breeze, as if he were the west wind's legal heir, though restricted in the airy part of his own system.

"This is all very fine, old chap," said Gaston, whose coarse nature must have coarse expression; "but before we get back to Thirlstone, there will be bellows to mend, and no mistake. But go ahead, while you can, my boy."

The willing horse made play, with vigour, and with gaiety, among

the rugged boulders, and the combings of the tussocks, and the tiring softness of the many oozy tangles; till the roughness of the ground, and breathless burden of the air, began to tell upon his lathered flanks, and legs that wanted scraping. He panted with long labour, and began to hang his head down, as he carefully put foot after foot, on the steppy rise that winds along the breast of Watern-tor. There Gaston halted him upon a rocky platform, and took a careful survey of the wild and threatening prospect.

By this time it was rightly manifest, both to man and beast, that a great turmoil of the world above them was preparing to break loose. Over the heights, dark clouds were piling, like sacks upon a wool-comber's wain; in the deep glens, heat-fogs still were huddling; while along the followings, and ins and outs, of landscape, a confusion of the settlement of light and shade was moving.

Mr. Gaston felt his hair prick up, and the whole of his system throb with fear. He looked for the Kestor rocks, the most conspicuous height in front of him; and lo, they were covered with a depth of tempest, letting down vast loops of gray! He looked to the right and left, along the hollow reaches of the waste, and towards him rolled the sable billows of storm-clouds big with thunder.

Then his spirit failed within him, and his heart sank low, and he deeply wished for a cellar, or a cave, in the bowels of the wholesome earth. He durst not go for his broad-brimmed hat, and wig, concealed in the bracken, but urged his reluctant horse out of the homeward track, and down to the low ground. This led him to the source of the South Teign; and so along some winding bottoms, to the Moreton road. Gaston, in his terror, would have been too glad to set off at full gallop for Moreton; and as it was, he followed that road for some distance, until it began to mount a cloud-capped hill, another nucleus of the storm. For according to all accounts of that great tempest, it differed from all others within memory, not only in power and extent, but also in the manner of its formation. For it neither came with the wind, nor against it (although first appearing perhaps in the south-east), but accumulated gradually round the whole horizon, converging steadfastly towards the zenith, and compassing (as with a great black tent) the whole of the moor, till it filled it all with fire.

As yet, there had been neither flash nor peal, only one or two distant rumbles, over the sea, or the lowland. And except for a strange thick feeling, and a difficulty of breathing, and a weak uneasy drowsiness, a man (who was a moderate conductor) might

have got into a quarry pit, and gone into his conscience, without extreme severity. Mr. Gaston, however, had a lively sense of being too good a conductor, and he found himself tingling already, with a nervous surcharge of electricity. This added considerably to his alarm; and he would have been glad to perspire it off; but his ploddings in the sultry morning, and great radiations of profane expletives, had left the bodily surface dry, and clogged with saline particles.

"All haste now for the *Raven;* what a fool not to have thought of it!" he whispered to himself, for he feared to speak aloud, lest it should bring down the impending thunder-crash. "This hollow must lead towards it; and there is deep shelter there. Get along, you old screw; what are you afraid of? The proper thing, for you, is a stout crab-stick."

The horse deserved none of these coarse reproaches, being ready, and steady, both in saddle and in harness; and now if he were nervous, whose fault was it? He felt that his rider was in a sad stew of terror; and he would not have been a horse, unless he shared it. And above him, on his off-side and his near side—from his own point of view, a ridiculous distinction—unknown monsters, without any love for horseflesh, were preparing, with tremendously long lashes, to descend on him. Away for the *Raven*, or for any other spot, where manger, hay, and brother horses could be found!

Suddenly, he heard a pleasant sound, a sound associated in his healthy mind with a quiet day's rest in a meadow, a discourse through a hedge with a ladylike cow, or a tranquil survey (with the chin upon a gate) of a road, that will not jar the hoofs till to-morrow —the sound of a bell, calling human flesh to church. Clearly enough it was a large rich bell, a long way off, in some high tower, melodiously, with measured swing, inviting all of a quiet mind, to hear good words in a holy place. Through the menace of the brooding storm, and deepening awe of cloud and crag, the mellow tone came, gently varying, with the ebb and flow of sound. To a youthful sinner, wavering and tremulous, it might have been the pulse of mercy, or throb of some good angel's heart.

To this man there was no such message, for the echo of his soul was gone. All his misgivings were of the body. If church, or chapel, would save his body; that was the sacred place for him. He pulled up the horse, and with his hand spread from his eyebrows, peered along the hovering arcade of storm. Rising from the lower level, half a league away or so, and not as yet enveloped in the cloud-mass of the moor, was a shapely tower of fair granite,

the finest, and best proportioned piece of masonry, round Dartmoor. Successful miners had built it, as their free thankoffering to the Lord, in the days when men were not too sublime to believe in a Power over them. It was the tower of Christowell The bell, with native silver rich, the largest of the seven, ceased calling ; and the four o'clock service was begun.

" It must be more than twenty years, since I saw the inside of a church," Gaston communed with himself; " but any port in a storm, we say ; and nobody knows me hereabout. And if they did, it would all tell for me. Larks will not be there, of course. But I will not go, if I can help it. On for the *Raven*, if we can. When the storm is gone by, my turn will come."

He was keeping to the right, to pass the church afar, and get into a track below the crest ; when the volume of the storm came sweeping towards him, like a rolling-up of heaven. " We will hasten to the house of the Lord," he cried, in a stupor of wild ribaldry, shot across with memory of childhood's faith, and of kneeling beside his mother. In a few minutes, he was at the churchyard gate, where the coffins rested in bad weather ; and he pulled the trembling horse in through, and knotted the bridle on a tombstone.

They were singing the psalm before the sermon, with an unusual depth of voice ; encouraging one another's vitality, as they do at funerals. Each man, with his open mouth, nudged up to his neighbour growing dark to him ; and the women in the lower row, held hands, to keep their voices. A peculiar smell oppressed the church ; as if the dead were rising.

The great west door, beneath the tower, was open, where the bell-ropes hung, with the frayed hemp glistening in the darkness, like so many hangman's nooses. Gaston stole his way between them, to the pillar of the western arch ; and slipped into the church unseen ; for every mind was overborne with a heavy load of doubt and fear ; and every eye was cowering, at the creeping shades of roof and wall.

The cold awe of the vaulted gloom redoubled Gaston's terror ; and he sank upon a low bench fitted round the octagonal plinth of a tall, gray pier. Then he pulled off his flexible hat, and muttered some confused words into it ; and if they were not words of prayer, it was from want of practice.

The vicar, with a slow and solemn step, went up the winding pulpit-stairs, every rustle of his surplice sounding, through the breathless hush around. And when he knelt, for his own silent prayer upon the cushion, the murmuring of the Christow brook

came in at the chancel window, and was heard throughout the church by many, who had never heard it there before, and never should here it anywhere again.

The parson's voice was trembling slightly, not from fear, but solemn awe, as he pronounced his text, the prayer of David in the hour of dread—*Let me fall into the hand of the Lord.* Before he had pronounced it twice, thick blackness fell upon roof, and window, pillar, arch, and sepulchral stone. A man could scarcely see his wife, or little ones, at his elbow ; mothers caught their children up, to be sure of being near them ; and the preacher's voice came out of the night.

In this last moment of his life, Mr. Gaston knew not what he did. Supreme terror held him, soul and body ; while his blood, like a boiling fountain, rushed. A delicate figure, dressed in white, stood near him at the column's base. Trembling, so that he could not stand, he spread one hand before his eyes, with the elbow on a ledge for books. Then his other hand came forth, and clasped, in wild hope of some saving power, the skirt of a gentle maiden. It was Rose, who stood with her form so straight, and her face as firm as marble ; the daughter of the man he was come here to murder.

Then fell the greatest crash of tempest ever known in England. The tower was cleft, the church was rent, the people cast, like blasted straws. The roof flew wide, the pillars snapped, the timbers fell like cobwebs, and the walls were riven as a bladder bursts. Pitchy night, and stifling vapour, shrouded all who were unconsumed.

This was not for one moment only ; but (if any human reckoning of such time were possible) to count it by the things that happened, makes five minutes of it. For instance, there were eight boys piled upon the communion-table, who after their dinner had been at school, and were sitting round the altar-rails. They all got off, when their sense returned—which could not have happened immediately—and then another electric fling, though less severe, replaced them. Also, it is quite certain, that a man who was surviving (being Thomas Read, the warrener) made the first attempt to go out of church ; with his brindled dog, covered in sulphur sparks, sniffing the way in front of him. But when the dog came to the arch of the tower, where a man was sitting steadfastly, he was caught up, and whirled seven times round, and cast upon the step into the tower, as dead as if he never had been born. This made Thomas Read draw back, and saved him from an

unripe end ; for the bier of the church, with its six legs flying, went by him like artillery practice, and must have passed through the chancel window, being found in the thatch of a linhay far below, when the burials were done without it.

All, who got over it, are agreed that it must have gone on, for at least five minutes ; and some say a great deal more than that. It began, with a great ball of fire descending, and splitting the north side of the tower, then scorching all the bell-ropes, and passing up the nave, after killing one man in the archway. Then it killed another man, with his head against a stone, by driving his skull into the granite, took all the hair off an elderly woman (her Sunday hair, new that morning), and then parted into a big globe, and a small one ; the big going out through the roof, and the small one through the chancel window.

After that, nobody knows what happened ; for they all fell down upon their faces, with the thundering of stones and beams above them, and conviction of the Judgment-day. In the stench of sulphur, men held breath, and women chewed their handkerchiefs. Through the woodwork of the pews, they could see the lightning to and fro, like clotted snakes ; and a roar (like an overshot wheel in a flood) rang along their backbones. For it was not one explosion only, but a continuous rush and blaze, of which there is only one other instance* recorded in this country—a volume of solid fire, like that fearful power "field-lightning" which wraps with flame a league of herbage, in the Jura Mountains.

When the worst was gone, but the shattered building filled with blue sulphureous fog, and smother of bitumen, the first to stand up was Farmer Willum, being the parish-warden. "Neighbours, in the name of God, shall us venture forth, as many as be alive of us?" he asked, for he could not see the parson, through the thickness of the air. But Mr. Short stood up in the pulpit, unharmed, and without any sign of fire ; and he said, with a resolute voice, "Not so ; first let us thank the Lord, who has preserved us ; and then let us pray, that our courage may return." With great presence of mind, he put by his sermon, to do for the next Sunday afternoon, when he added some most impressive words. One of the covers had been consumed ; and the other bore the image of a death's head upon it, stamped by the lightning, or the fire-ball. To the present day, it is as plain as ever ; and it has been declared, by all who knew him, to be the head of George Gaston.

* The great storm at Widecombe in the Moor, Sunday, October 21, 1638

CHAPTER LI.

SENT TO JUDGMENT.

In a commemorative poem, even finer than that inscribed upon the tablet, where the fire first came in, the gifted author (who is said to have been the schoolmaster of the village) has inserted the following apposite reflection—

> "Oh that our people, with a good a heart,
> Would come to church, as then they did depart!
> True zeal were that, oh what a joy to see,
> Folk flocking in, as fast as they did flee!"

However, that can hardly be expected, in the present condition of human nature. It is said, that one very affectionate mother was so much astonished, that she went home, without remembering that she had taken her only child to church with her. But coming to herself, when she returned to see the dead bodies brought out of the church, which was not done until evening, she besought the sexton to go in and look; and there the little child was found, going hand in hand with another little child, neither of them hurt, nor showing a sign of fear, or fire, in their faces. And it is a remarkable thing, that while seven people were killed, and sixty-two were injured, not a single child in the church was hurt; though the seats they were sitting on, were torn up fiercely, and some even cast up through the roof.

The reason why Rose was sitting by the western arch, instead of in her father's pew, was simply that she had been late for the service, and did not like to disturb the people. Her father stayed at home, preparing for that journey to London, which he could no longer put off; although he knew not, even now, the full urgency of the case; because the clerk, despatched by Latimer and Emblin, had failed as yet to find him. But he now was aware of his father's death; and loth as he was to claim his own position, he could not but feel, that his duty to Rose compelled him to come forward.

He would have kept Rose at home as well, because of the threatening weather; but she begged so hard to go, for this last time, and promised so sincerely to escape the rain, if any, that she got her own way as usual. But the captain could not help thinking, that he had been very foolish in letting her go. As the sky grew darker and darker, his heart became more and more uneasy; until he could not stay in the house, but must go forth to see things.

What he saw, from the spur of the hill, enforced his fear upon him mightily; for the church, betwixt him and the village, was wattled round with thick black clouds, rolling downward spirally. Then it seemed to be swallowed up, with one vast roar, as if the earth closed over it; and then it reappeared, with shattered ribs, and liquid fire running through them, like a metal-foundry. It looked impossible, after that, for any one to be alive inside.

With a crawling heart, the captain ran, as fast as ever his legs would go, not so much to save his dear child's life, as to drag her body from the flames. Church, and churchyard, all alike, appeared to be one mass of fire; which may have been the effect of the sulphur, covering all things with blue reek. He would have rushed into the church, before the force of the crash was over—which also shows that it lasted long—and perhaps he would thus have lost his life; but the western doors (having square studs of iron) were torn from their hinges, and flung across the way. The same thing had happened to the side-door on the north; but that not being so heavy, Captain Larks was enabled to drive a way through, with his foot; and he was setting off for his own pew, through the smoke and crush of everything—the last explosion of the air, which slew the poor dog, being over—when he saw close to him a soft white figure; and there was his daughter in his arms!

Her beautiful hair had been shed all round her, and she cried a good deal, as might be expected; and her hands, and face, were deadly cold. But beyond that, and her clinging to him (as was natural to life, in so much death) nobody could have guessed, to see her, that she had been in the middle of a fireball. Yet that is truly no exaggeration; let those explain it, who have the power.

"Why don't you come away, my darling?" asked the captain, who was weeping also, in this great relief of heart. "Darling, there will be floods of rain, almost instantly. Do come."

"Father, this poor man holds my dress; and I fear that he is not well," she said, pointing round the granite plinth. "He was frightened a great deal more than I was; and I hope the Lord has spared him."

But the Lord had done otherwise; and all must be resigned to it. The captain put forth his hand, and laid it, through an especial thickness of air, upon the head of a man, who was sitting forward, propped by his elbow on a desk. The scalp of the man was there, with hair as stiff as wire upon it; also his countenance shining blue, and set in the form of a coffin, as it had been, in his boyhood. But his brains were gone, and lay behind him in a grey heap on the flags.

"Come away, my darling," the captain whispered, detaching the dead hand from her dress, and getting between, that she might not see; "he is frightfully stunned. We will go, with all haste, and send the doctor to him."

Shuddering himself he led his shuddering daughter through the darkness, and a sudden chill, as if heaven had exhausted all its heat, blew round them.

Then began the most furious rain, ever known even on Dartmoor. It must have burst forth on the heights ere this; for the Christow was coming down, like a brown wall, jutted on the crest with jags of rock. Three months of drought were to be made up; and nature spared no effort towards it. Rose, and her father, were drenched, before they passed through the gate of their meadow; and the moment they had crossed the drawbridge, a dash of flood-wave carried it away. Till the morning, they were quite cut off from chance of hearing any more than the roll of deluged thunder, and the rushing of the flood.

But in the morning, courage came to the stunned, and battered village, and the quiet runs of shadow, where poor people live and are content. Many a cottage, not so tall as to invite the lightning, nor so big as to challenge the wind-blast, had been robbed of long paternal comforts, and of high maternal pride—settles, wool-chairs, feather-beds, dishes, "dowered with" a gravy-well, and Britannia-metal teapots—by the roaring felony of the little brook, that scarcely filled their kettles, when they went to church. And worse than that, ten times as bad, there was scarcely a cot, accustomed to soft gossip, and loving desire to know all about its neighbours, that was not full of scalding groans, and quick pain rolled in greased lint.

In this deep trouble of the wounded, and the dying, there appeared a hero, and a heroine. Or, to put it more correctly, all the good deeds done centred by attraction round those two, as in Classic Mythology, and in every British crisis. Now this pair was, Dicky Touchwood, and Sporetta Perperaps.

Poor Squire Dicky, still in exile at the vicarage, and stanch in his scorn of drysalterism, had escaped the worst issue of that great electric force, by the perfect formation of his feet. Of this he was not, at the moment, aware; but his mother proved it afterwards.

It appears that the lightning ran under his insteps, which were arched by nature (in a Gothic arch, like those of all young ladies now), and instead of tearing, it only tossed him, like the lad of pith he was. Coming down happily on all fours, he was not only unhurt, but filled with activity, hitherto undeveloped, though latent

in his system; as a close observer might have judged, from his manner of dancing one foot. And few of the many strange facts recorded concerning that great commotion of the elements, are stranger, than the permanent change effected in the nature of Squire Dicky. Unscientific persons might ascribe that effect to other causes; alarm for instance at his father's conduct, or daily intercourse with Parson Short, or the fright of the storm, and the narrow escape, or the saddening power of deep suffering around. But science is always correct, and allows no room for any but its own opinion; and science declared that the organic substances, and protoplastic synthesis of psychic neontology, in that portion of the Cantab which was called his mind, had (through the agency of thermo-electric currents) undergone a process of precipitation, not impossibly combined with fusion, which—to put it in plain English—had made him much less of a fool than he used to be.

Thus, when five men could not lift the beam, which had dropped between the parson and the clerk, jamming Mr. Short up in the pulpit, so that he could not help others or himself, it was young Squire Dicky to whom it first occurred, that there is in this country a tool, called a saw. Neither did any one else perceive, until he impressed it on them, that the first attention should be given to the living, and not to those who were beyond all help. For the poor folk were scared out of all possession, by this roaring fury of the Evil One.

For as soon as the people, who escaped from church, told their story to the people who had stayed at home, they found out the meaning of all that had happened; which they could not in any way account for before, without thinking ill of the House of the Lord. But now, it was much to the credit of the church, that its principal enemy had been inside it. For the blacksmith of Christowell, a long-haired grimy man, never known to go to church, or chapel, had been visited by Satan, some years back, while swearing very hard, because he could not get a plough-share into form. He was panting by his bellows, and his quart of beer was empty, when the Evil One stood by him, with an apron on, and said, "I will do it for you, Josiah, for a very little manners on your part. Promise me, that if you go to sleep in church, I may pass my fingers through your hair." "Done," replied the blacksmith; "for I never go to church." Then the stranger touched the plough-share with one finger, and it smoked, and bent, like a hedger's glove, into the shape required. For seven years, Josiah carried on his business, without going to sleep in any church whatever, because he remained outside

the door. But when he lost his wife, his daughter Betsy did persuade him to come to church with her, on the Sunday next the funeral, to show their black clothes, as all respectable folk do. The weather was so drowsy, and the church so hot, that his head began to nod towards his knees ; and then he put his elbows on his new black breeches, and his chin between his thumbs, and could not help snoring. Then there was seen at the *Three Horse-shoes,* a lean dark figure, on a tall black horse. He called for a quart of ale ; and it was noticed by the maid who served him, that it hissed down his throat, like the quenching of hot iron ; and the pot smelled of brimstone ever afterwards. When he came to the churchyard, he threw the horse's bridle on the tombstone of a man, who had cut his own throat ; then striding in through the west arch, with smoke around him, passed his hand through the long hair of Josiah, and vanished up the tower, which he cleft in twain, with a tremendous thunder-clap.

This tale had been proved to be over true, by a man upon the road, where the air was clearer, who could swear, if it was his dying day, that while the great roar was going on, a horse with broken bridle, flashed by him, like a mad thing ; and Mr. Perrott knows that his good nag, *Charlie,* came piteously crying to get in, that night, drenched and foundered, and most eager to relate adventures as yet not in human language.

Moreover the blacksmith's corpse was found, more than ten landyards from the church ; where it certainly never could have fetched itself.

Miss Perperaps escaped, even more completely than the gallant Cantab, simply by not being there at all, but attending to poor Mrs. Sage, who still suffered from the spines of the hedgehog, on account of her age. Also her father had exercised the medical privilege of contemplating the sacred building externally. And now these two laboured in their vocation, earning quantities of money, which never were paid. Except that the doctor was wise enough not to part, without the money down, with a single one of his prophylactic antiphlogistic pillules ; without which, no person in Christowell ventured near a cloud of any sort, that winter.

One of the most severely scorched, of the sixty-two who got over it, was poor Samuel Slowbury. And this was all the more hard upon him, because he came very much against his will, and only to oblige his wife, by getting rid of Achan's curse. He had pledged himself on his father's Bible (to escape bad dreams, and scoldings even worse), that he would slip into the church-bag, that day, done

up in brown paper, as if it were a penny, those three guineas which he had received for betraying, and spying upon, his master. Not thus, however, was he justified; but paid with his skin, for the sin of his soul. Men of science have declared that no man can survive the loss of more than 28 per cent. of his natural covering against the air. Sam Slowbury lost, at the mildest computation, very nearly twice as much as that; yet after a time of suffering (which made him feel, enough for fifty, and to the end of his existence hate all flies), he was finally restored to his large, but lean, family, with the the stamp of the royal mint upon him. Under his girdle—or in stricter fact, his waistcoat pocket—on the toughest of his cracklins not singed off, were two indelible George and Dragons, and one fine countenance of George the Third, King of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, and Defender of the Faith. Sam charged a shilling, to a great extent, for showing these; and reared an honest family, without excessive labour.

What with the furious rain, and the fright, and the darkening of the evenings—for now it was come to the equinox—the shattered church was scarcely cleared of the poor scorched sufferers, that night. All, who were unhurt, worked hard, under the guidance of Mr. Short, Dicky Touchwood, and Miss Perperaps. After the flood came down in full, the Christow could not be passed for hours, except at one spot, where a pair of granite pillars served to carry some long planks; and this delayed the clearance of the church as well. The large proportion of the wounded to the killed (being almost as nine to one) surprised all who were not in either number, and aroused their pious gratitude. And thus the didactic poet above mentioned, after delicate allusion to Slowbury's case, which he feared to describe too nicely, declares with true poetic force—

> "I am astonished, both in heart and head,
> To see so many, yet so few, lie dead."

Those, who were happily absent, must not speak as if they knew much about it; yet it was maintained upon inquiry, that the rush from heaven, which clove the tower, dashed to pieces all it met; while the fire of the stony floor, and of the earth replying, burned the outside faces, and skin coverings, of the people.

And a sad case indeed was that of the excellent Mrs. Aggett; who deserved to be spared, if ever anybody did; and was so connected with the very pulpit, that she could speak orders for the sermon's length, to the make-up, and the measure, of her own kitchen-fire. If she had been roasted, with her best dress off, and

the little dog to turn the spit, she never could have been more purely browned, and she never could have carried on the noise she did about it.

Mr. Short was much concerned. But knowing many others to be ten times worse, he would not have her seen to first; for which she promised to forgive him, as soon as she should be strong enough. Forgetful of his own interest, he pushed on, carrying with his own sturdy arms some of his charred parishioners, to an empty barn of Farmer Willum's, which was to be the hospital, for those who could not be carried home. Then the dead were taken home; and it must have been quite midnight, when, with lanterns raised, they came to one, unknown to any present.

"What a fearful sight!" the parson whispered, holding back the others. "The face is a very remarkable one; and the figure is that of a large, strong man. Is there no one here who knows him?"

All shook their heads, as they gazed with awe. "A bad 'un whoever he were," said one; "I reckon 'twere he, who drawed down the storm."

"Hush!" replied Mr. Short; "who shall judge a man, gone to his judgment? If no one knows him, let him stay. To move him would destroy all knowledge. No rain falls here. Go, and fetch the curtain that fell from the chancel window. We will fix it before him, until to-morrow. All the neighbourhood will be here to-morrow, and some one, perhaps, to identify him. Any one, who has ever seen it, will recognise such a face as that."

So, that which had been George Gaston spent the first night of death, with none to heed it; alone in the awful darkness, and the grisly taint, and ghastly ruins; itself the most awful form of darkness, and the most ghastly ruin.

CHAPTER XLII.

UNVEILED.

"Oh, father dear, even if he comes, I beg you to put it off a little. After all the years, we have spent at Christowell, it will seem so unkind to leave it now. And I am—I seem to feel so very odd to-day. The things, that I have heard, seem to strike me, like the lightning; after my being in the midst of them. But how wicked of me, to be talking of myself!"

Already, on the Monday morning, frightful, and (if that were possible) exaggerated tales of the Christowell catastrophe had reached Larks' Cot; and the captain's main reason for insisting on departure, at the time appointed, was his dread of the effect upon his darling's health. The furnace of death, from which she had come forth unscathed, like the holy children, might have spared her only for the moment, if she stayed among the scenes which followed. Therefore he rejoiced, that he had fixed that day, for Pugsley to fetch them to Moreton; where Rose would remain, while her father went on to London. But now he looked closely at this dear child—whose life was all the world to him—and he doubted, whether she could bear the jolting of what Master Pugsley described as, "our oncommon aisy vaheykkel."

"Here he is! Here he is, I do declare! What can have brought him without his breakfast?" cried Rose, who was always excited about Pugsley; "and the stream is still very strong for him to cross; and he really has got two—two gentlemen with him. One is that kind old Mr. Tucker. But I have no idea who the other is."

The other soon proved who he was; for strong indignation is not silent, except in a highly superior mind. Mr. Greatorex, a young insurgent attorney of the future, the foremost desk, and the cleverest quill, in the clerks' room of Latimer and Emblin, had been sent from pillar to post, for a fortnight, to find out such a hole as this!

Pugsley's red face was expanded, with a glow of gentle joy. The common lay mind hates the lawyer; as the lay body objects to the doctor, and the soul is timorous of the parson. So that both Pugsley, and Master Tucker, had listened, throughout the long drive from Moreton, to the plaints, and menaces of this warm youth, with furtive shrugs, and some interchange of winks. The clerk and the carrier now came up, with decorous salutes to a genuine earl; but the timber-merchant gave his hand as usual; and Captain Larks bowed, as he pressed it warmly.

"I ought to have been here before now," Mr. Tucker explained, with dignity; "not for the change in your fortunes, my lord; but because of my duty, to a man who trusts me. But the fault is not mine, sir; as you will see. Our folk never came home, till Saturday night, with all their heads turned. Never to London shall they go again, so long as I be living. You would think there was nothing to Exeter, good enough to put their shoes on; yet all the time they was in London, they was crying up Exeter. And Snacks, who

married my sister, has behaved the worst of all. Whether it was that he knew too much, or too little, or compounded with the lawyers——"

"Not so," said Mr. Greatorex, coming forward; "our firm is above all that. But it was felt, my lord, that in a position like this, you should be well advised; and that our firm should approach you first, with an accurate statement of the case. I was despatched, with promptitude; but, through wrong information purposely supplied, I have been wandering for several days, over this beautiful, but frightfully rough county. Perhaps none but myself would have found your lordship now. I have no skin left, in several places—but that will form the basis of a future action. May I have the honour of speaking with your lordship, quite in private?"

"As soon as you please. But Mr. Tucker shall hear all. Mr. Tucker is the truest friend I have. And I wish him to hear everything."

General Punk, who had been cured in three doses, by Spotty Perperaps, was now gone back to Westcombe, and preparing there for a great campaign. The captain showed them into the room, which had been his; while Pugsley told wonderful tales in the kitchen.

"I am in the best possible hands," said the captain, as soon as he had learned all particulars of moment; "and I see no occasion for extreme haste now. Perhaps you, Mr. Greatorex, will return at once to your excellent principals, with a note from me. I will follow, as soon as things permit. You have heard of the terrible disaster here. I must go down. Will you come with me?"

Mr. Tucker had hired a carriage at Exeter, on the Sunday morning, hoping to be at Christowell that day; but at Moreton, the moor rose frightfully before them, swathed in black, and laced with fire. The driver turned in at the *White Hart*, and stopped, and would not come out again; and there they found the lawyer, also weather-bound, and fuming. Some one told them that Pugsley was ordered to start, right early in the morning, to fetch a gentleman; who proved to be the very one they both were seeking.

Now while these three were gazing with amazement, at the sad wreck of the tower, and the crocketed pinnacles stuck into the earth (like the sceptre of Canute, in pictures), Mr. Short, who had been up to the leads almost—while every one trembled at his hardihood—and had sounded the bells, of which not one was hurt, and had pushed a great stone down, calling "ware, below," and had waved his hat out at the tremendous-thunder hole, so that people

fell flat in the churchyard—he, with his week-day hat full of something, came out, as rank-minded, as if there were no Satan. "Just look at this," said he; "it is extraordinary stuff. Opposite the hole where the flash came in, there is a great dab of it on the wall, as large as——" his expression must not be repeated; but the object he referred to may be found in pasture land. "I shall keep some, as a curiosity; although it certainly does not smell nice."

"It stinks alive!" exclaimed Mr. Tucker; "pitch, and brimstone, and dead men's flesh! I have heard of it before, but never seen it. Cast it from you, reverend sir."

"No, gentlemen. I am getting used to horrors, after nothing else, for nearly twenty-four hours. This deposit should be in the British Museum. But come in, and see, what is greatly on my mind."

The vicar of Christowell, heretofore so keen, judicious, and sensible, was driven from his usual frame of mind, by long excitement, and want of sleep. "There," he said, drawing the red curtain back; "we cannot indentify this poor man. And how can we bury him, without it? The strong face shows a man of mark; yet none of the thousand gazers know him."

"I know him by name," cried Mr. Tucker, shuddering, for he was gentle-hearted; "I am sure, it is one George Gaston."

"And I know him, more than by name;" said young Greatorex. "What villainy was he come for here? Lord Delapole, it is your deadly enemy. The man who has laboured, to rob, and ruin you."

"I never harmed him; and I am truly glad of it. I have long felt that some one was against me; but I never even knew his name, except through Mr. Tucker. Let us say nothing against him now."

He spoke very softly, as a man impressed with the littleness of human things; and the others, in such a presence, felt that he was right, and screened the dead.

In the afternoon, when Greatorex was gone off, in all haste to London, and Mr. Short, with his mind relieved, though sad and heavy for his people, was resting at last in his own room, but Christowell churchyard still was thronged with timid, and wondering people; among tossed monuments, and headlong tombstones, cast about like skittle-pins, two persons met, and looked with some surprise, at one another.

"Like a bombardment, ain't it, sir?" said the younger of the two,

though well of age, as he made a soldier's salute; "reminds me of how it was at Badajos."

"Ah, you were there? I know your face, but at present, I forget your name, my friend; if indeed I ever knew it."

"Rees Howell, sir, of the —— Hussars, 'the never-mind-what,' they used to call us. Most of us knew Colonel Westcombe."

"Because I knew most of your officers," answered the colonel, with his usual modesty; "but where are you living now, Rees Howell?"

"At the *Raven*, with my father, sir. I only came home yesterday. Just in front of this great storm. I never saw worse, in any of the Serries, as they call them. 'Tis as bad as a general action almost. The barns are full of groaners, as we used to call the wounded chaps. I've a great mind to tuck up my sleeves, and help. I have seen a good bit of scorching."

"Rees Howell, I am going to do the same, with permission of the doctors. I hope you have no friend, or relative hurt."

"No, sir. The only one that I know is a dead man, and he might have made one of me yesterday; for he drew a pistol on me, by Cranmere; and I made sure he would have shot me. Ah! he was a bad one, by his face. I speak the same of a chap, live, or dead. You can't hurt him, when he's gone to the devil. And if ever I see a man fit for roasting—and I've been about the world a good bit too. But who do you think I saw here, not half an hour agone, sir, and made me stare so, when I met you? It never rains, but it pours sure enough, about Dartmoor; though I knew from my father, that you were there, colonel. Why the poor young captain, young enough he was then, who told such a pile of lies, to save his brother, and was ready to be shot for it, without a button moving. There was only myself, and one other man beside their two selves, that knew all about it."

"Howell, you surprise me;" answered Colonel Westcombe; leading him to a retired tomb stone; "I have always understood—is it possible, that any man can have sacrificed himself so?"

"Yes, sir. I suppose, they made it square between them, for the younger one to take the shame, with a heap of cash to ease it. The elder one gave £50, for me, and Bill Hosier, to divide—the only two that could swear to the truth—upon oath to hold our tongues about it. And not being asked, why should we speak, sir, when they had settled it between them?"

"That was your view of it, and natural enough. But how could you two alone know the truth, and be out of all doubt concerning it?"

"Simply enough, sir; as you will say. The night was like pitch, you may remember; and after ten hours in saddle, our eyelids was the brightest part of them. The shame of it turned upon the question, which of them two crossed the river; for the one that had crossed could have nothing to do with the runaway—make, or mention it. And it may sound queer, but true it is, the night being such, and the wood so black, and the boat-bridge so dangerous in the dark, not one of us might have been sure, next morning, which of the brothers came with us, without a little causal accident. Leastways, the two were so much alike, in size, and voice, and standing, that I could not have sworn which was which, in the dark, against their own word about it. Although I should have known, in my own mind, which it was, from his manner of giving orders. But there happened to be, on the further bank, a pit of white stuff, as white as pipe-clay; and into that our captain popped, up to the tops of his big saddle-boots, and Bill Hosier, and me, gave a hand to pull him out. The bridge was unsafe in the dark for horses, so we crossed on foot, to keep a look-out there.

"Colonel, I ran away, as fast as anybody, when the great alarm arose; back over the bridge, in a twinkling, every one of us, and up on the first horse we could lay hold of, and skittered on the heels of the rest of them. The captain drew his sword, and stood before us, but the rush of men went over him, and he had the place all to himself and welcome. In the morning we slunk back, all straggling anyhow, and ashamed to look at one another; and he must have slipped from a by-road in among us, to share the disgrace of the lot of us. And he did more than that, he took it all upon himself, when the general rode up to inquire; and you know the rest, as well as I do. But Hosier, and I, saw the white stuff on his boots, and could swear where that had come from, and who was the only man that kept his post, and tried to deliver us from being laughed at; and his name was 'Captain Arthur Pole.'"

"And you were content to stand by, and see him shot, for the sake of £50, you scoundrels!"

"No, Colonel Westcombe, that is not fair. The money was not spoken of, till after that, when his life was out of danger. But you know what the service was, and what men are. Neither Hosier, nor I, had a chance to open mouth. We were all under guard, and could not get at one another; and we did not hear a word of what was going on. Bill thought, the same, as I did, until we got together, that the saddle would surely be put on the right horse. And when we were brought out to see the execution, 'Silence' was the order,

and not one of us dare move ; though our flesh upon our bones was creeping. If one of us had broken rank, a bullet would be through him. For the general, to add to our disgrace, had drawn the rest of the Light Division round us. Ah, colonel, I never shall forget that day. But we made up for all of it afterwards."

"Ay, that you did. You were desperate fellows. I never shall forget the next time you were in action. Howell, I am delighted to have heard your tale. It has solved a great mystery, that has lasted many years. I suppose you are ready to make oath to it, before any magistrate, if called upon."

"At any moment, colonel. And Bill Hosier is living. I came across him, not so very long ago. He keeps the *Nag's Head* at Ipswich."

"Very well. Say no more about it, unless you are called upon to do so. But don't leave this neighbourhood, without my knowledge.

CHAPTER LIII.

RESIGNATION.

BEFORE any one, at Touchwood Park, could hear of the great calamity, a letter from Mr. Short arrived, with assurance of Dicky's safety. But the young squire, thinking that they well deserved a fright, had added these words, without the parson's knowledge. "It is true that I am spared ; but in divine retribution on my father's impious scheme, I bear upon my brow, for ever, the vivid impression of a high-dried ham. We are all marked with something ; and I am marked with this, from its constant presence in my mind. However, it makes no difference."

"I don't believe a word of it," said Miss Touchwood ; "Dicky always has been a dreadful story-teller. And if he has got it, we can rub it out with pumice-stone, and squeeze a little *aqua fortis* in. Don't be so foolish, mother dear. He would have written three pages, if it were true. And even if it is, why should we weep? He will be useful in the world, at last, by giving people an appetite. And it proves how right my father was, in choosing his vocation. He can show a sample of his goods ; and they dare not run a skewer through it."

"Julia, you have no feeling. That has always been your fault. Oblige me, by ordering the carriage, at once. Mr. Short begs me earnestly, not to go over, because of the awful sights, and scenes.

But what scene can be imagined, half so awful, as the Grecian countenance of my only son, with a high-dried ham upon its brow? I shall go, and tell your father my opinion of him. Don't talk to me about men, after that." In spite of all his strength of mind, Sir Joseph got the worst of it, and was glad to hear wheels at the door, once again.

In such a condition of things, Miss Touchwood had no idea of being left behind. With a quickness of kindness, which did her credit, she put on a pretty half-mourning dress, with a gentle imaginative want of pattern, and a mildness of lustre, like tears that are suppressed. It became her wonderfully well; and she was not entirely ignorant of that fact.

Not far from the turn-pike, they overtook a very nice old gentleman, a squire in a poor way now, but rich with long descent of education (even as *Nous* among dogs was); and he never was arrogant to the Touchwoods, although he was so much poorer. Now Julia had a weakness for nice old gentlemen, as handsome and clever girls often have; and so she invited Squire Wrey into the carriage, little dreaming of the consequence to her own life. For Mr. Wrey, who had been present in the church, and about among the people afterwards, could speak of nothing else, but the grandeur, and sublimity, of Mr. Short's behaviour. Like a strenuous churchman, and stiff-hearted Tory, he almost considered this great blow a blessing, from the glory accruing to the Established Church.

"'Heroic,' is scarcely the word for it, madam," he said, (being rather hard of hearing) in reply to Lady Touchwood's agonised inquiry, whether her son had a ham on his forehead; "you pronounce it heroic; and you may well do so. But it was something much higher than that. There was a grandeur of self-possession, a dignity, a trust in Providence, combined with a majestic self-reliance, and a nobility of presence—although I am sure he must have longed to be somewhere else—which inspired us all, like the voice of a Nelson; but with a more tranquil, and lofty courage. With a beam, computed at three quarters of a ton, crashing, as you may say, between him, and the clerk (who made off with all celerity), this reverend, and most resolute, gentleman stuck to his text, till he couldn't hear his own voice. And after that, when there were seven people killed, and sixty-two wounded, and the church all in rags, did he say, 'let us run away'? No, madam, he said, 'let us pray.' And his prayer saved fifty lives at least; for if the survivors had all rushed out, one shudders to think of what

must have happened. I never heard a grander prayer in all my life ; though I like them out of the prayer-book, best."

"But how could he see above the beam?" asked Julia ; "he is so—— I mean he is not very tall."

"In the moment of trial, he seemed to tower. His moral elevation raised him, so that he looked gigantic in the smoke. Depend upon it, my dear young lady, no warrior in the battle-field has ever performed any feat of valour, half so noble, half so heroic—for after all, that is the word for it."

"But has my son got a ham on his forehead?" Lady Touchwood almost shouted ; so difficult was it to get a word in.

"It is not at all unlikely," the squire answered calmly ; "most people have got some mark, or other. One highly respectable young woman has a grid-iron with seven bars ; so that they might ——. But I must not make light of your anxiety, Lady Touchwood. Even if he has, how thankful you must feel!"

"Indeed then, I shall not. I shall never get over it. How much longer in going up this hill? Julia, call out to him, to whip them well."

"Your son has behaved with most admirable kindness," the old gentleman resumed, to make amends ; "I hear golden words everywhere of him, Lady Touchwood. He has spent every farthing of his money ; and what is more, he has worked like a horse with his own hands."

"He always does spend every farthing of his money," replied his sarcastic sister ; "but it is quite a new thing, for him to work with his own hands, like a horse. But here we are! Dicky, take your hat off, and show us the ham, upon your classic brow."

"Oh, that was only to bring you over, and to get the governor into a row," Squire Dicky replied, without a blush, and in like style eluding the maternal hug. "No, no ; not a hair have I turned yet ; though I hear that Betty Cork lost a good five pounds' worth, not long come from Exeter. Come and see Short ; he is a splendid fellow. You ought to have corking pins stuck into your backs, and the salting stool to sit against ; instead of white silk and eider-down. Then you might understand some little of my doings. I am an altered man, from this day forth."

"Well, I don't care ; so long as your face is the same." His dear mother wetted a lace handkerchief, from natural sources, and polished the marble of his Grecian forehead.

"An altered man! An altered boy ;" exclaimed the jealous Julia. "But any change must be for the better. There is no

change yet, in fibs and brag. What have you done? Mr. Short has done it all."

"No, indeed he has not;" cried the parson, coming out from the sick house Dick was entering; "Lady Touchwood, your son is a wonderful fellow. I had not the least idea, of the good stuff in him. He has been up all night, he has torn up all his linen, he has put up, like an angel, with any quantity of groans, and—and really, he has not once asked for so much as a single glass of beer!"

"Then he must be an altered character indeed;" said Julia, looking incredulous.

"You frighten me. Such things are out of all nature. Robert," exclaimed Lady Touchwood, "drive at once to the *Horse-shoes*, or whatever the place is called, and bring half-a-dozen of their best bottled ale. Oh, Mr. Short, can I ever be thankful enough, for this wonderful preservation. But, to carry it so far, is tempting heaven. Don't mind me. I shall get over it, if allowed to sit with Richard."

Mr. Short saw that he was not wanted; for her ladyship now desired to cry. "I would ask you, if you can spare a moment," said the ready Julia, "to show me, at least, the outside of the church."

"Gladly would I show you the inside too," replied Mr. Short, without any second meaning; "but I fear that it would be too great a venture. Stones, and beams, keep tumbling down."

"I should have no fear, with you to guide me," she answered, in her softest voice, with a glance that made him tremble more, than the most furious electric flash; "oh, how I do admire lofty courage, and grand chivalry!"

"So do I," said Mr. Short; "but one doesn't know where to find them. I believe that the only brave creature in the church—for I know that I was scared out of all my seven senses—was that beautiful Miss Arthur. For one moment, there came a lane of light between us, from some driftage of the smoke and reek; and there she stood, like a glorious Greek statue; not defiant, not dramatic, but simply with her courage gathered, to live, or to die, as the will of God might be. The sweet nobility of her face was beyond all the powers of sculpture."

"No doubt. That young lady is gifted with graces, which always have the fortune to come out. Others must always disappear, the moment she appears upon the scene. She must have some wonderful transcendant height of courage, by which she defies the

lightning, and fries fish. How long have you worshipped that Greek statue, Mr. Short?"

"Upon my word, Miss Touchwood, I had no idea, that you could talk such nonsense, if you tried. I am old enough to be little Rose's father, and I don't fall in love with the girls I christen. As it is, I have set my heart on a young lady, much too young for me to think of, in my nine and thirtieth year. I am even supposed to be older than that, from the dryness of my sermons, and the absence of anything florid in my theology; as well as because I keep my hair so short—and other things ladies cannot enter into."

"Yes they can. I demand to know them all; because my mother thinks so much of you. I have heard of Mrs. Aggett being sadly roasted; and it makes me so anxious, about—about your dinners. Mr. Wrey says that you have tasted nothing, but brimstone and bitumen, since your Sunday breakfast. I wish I knew anything about cooking—like the Greek statue—but I don't, I don't. Oh, Mr. Short, who is that young lady, so much too young, for you to think of? Will she let me come, and help her? For you are sure to have her."

"I wish I had any such faith in my powers. Will you promise to help me, with all your heart; if I tell you who it is?"

Miss Touchwood nodded blandly, and with an inexpressible slyness in her brilliant eyes, which even Mr. Short could not interpret. But he said to himself, "now, neck or nothing!"

"The young lady's name is Julia Touchwood. And I have loved her, for several years."

"And you had every right to do it;" said Julia, in her straightforward way; "and the lovely object has long suspected, that you felt an interest in her. But she waited for a proof, of what you were; because she has not much faith in words. And now she has got the proof; and is very proud to get it."

"Then, Julia, do you mean to say——"

"Certainly I do; and you may repent it. But I am too proud ever to repent; even when my mother has boxed my ears. Oh, Mr. Short, you won't do that?"

The place was a lonely one, and Mr. Short (scarcely believing in his good luck) did something else, to feel sure of things. And Julia said, "It is resignation; remember now, it is resignation only; which I have heard you insist upon, as at once a duty, and a blessing."

CHAPTER LIV.

CONJUGATION.

ASHAMED of furious outbreak, and fierce outrage upon tree, and flower, and friendly banks that cradle it, the Christow brook fell back to music, thoughtful pools, and smiling shallows. Among the captain's pears, remained the "witnessed usurpation;" but not a tree was washed away; so prudently had he taken heed of the possible range of water. Neither were his grapes much hurt; for no hail fell, within the focus of the storm; though around its margin, as at Plymouth and at Hatherleigh, hailstones as large as turkeys' eggs, and some of even 9-oz. weight, are reported to have fallen. Some of his bunches had their rich bloom slurred by the violence of rain, and some were splashed; but the tan had saved most of them from this; and upon the whole, they looked bright and handsome; and he might sell them, if so minded, as noble earls do nowadays, to turn an honest sixpence.

Reluctant still to take the needful plunge into the world of uproar, strife, deceit, and greed; and knowing that his interests could not suffer, in the hands of the good solicitors; he lingered awhile among his favourites, nearer to his nature, than pomp or luxury, wealth, or grandeur. For a week of bright October weather (the golden reckoning of fine years) was gleaming gently round all fruitage, with tender touch to ripen it. In the lovely afternoon, of tempered sun, and mellow shade, the captain took his accustomed course, with a tranquil mind, among tranquil things. Then a brisk step, as of an elderly man, going more on his heels than he used to do, fell softly, where the leaves were falling, and the grass was touched with gray.

Colonel Westcombe held out his hand, and bowed—a low bow, such as he never offered, even to the most exalted rank, unless his heart went with it. The captain looked at him, with some surprise, knowing what his nature was; and even with some pain, as if there were ceremony put between them.

"I am heartily ashamed to look at you;" said the colonel, gazing none the less, with his thick gray eyebrows moving; "what a fool I have been, for trusting facts, instead of trusting character!"

"You have been the kindest of the kind," the captain answered warmly; "when every one else disdained me, you had doubts, whether I deserved it. And I am not sure, that I do not. A man is too prone to acquit himself. But who has told you anything?"

"Everything has been told me, by a man who knows all about it.

I resolved to think it over first; lest I should seem to seek you, through your altered position in the world. But a little thought convinced me, that it was mean to imagine, that a man like you would impute such motives to me. So I waited for the month you fixed, and came the first day after it."

"I have been hoping to see you. Come, and sit upon my bench of thought; and tell me all that moves your mind."

"Nothing moves my mind," said Colonel Westcombe, listening thoughtfully to the murmur of the brook, and warbling of the independent robin; "so much as the wrongs, that we men do to one another, carelessly. Upon our own affairs, we cannot make our minds up, though desiring to have perfect balance; but we settle another man's business for him, and blast his name, without two thoughts. I feel, that I have done this to you; not wantonly, as some people have; but narrowly, very narrowly; and I ask your pardon for it. A young man would not have judged you so. The longer we live in this world, the less we come to know of it."

"Where is Jack?" asked the captain smiling; "according to your theory, my friend, we should call him in, to teach us wisdom.'

"And you would not be so far wrong there. That young man is of very keen perception. When old Punk said something, in Jack's hearing, concerning the father of a certain lovely girl, my son forgot the reverence due, to those who were born before him. Jack has been brought up like a Spartan, under the code of—I forget his name, Solon, or Epaminondas—and sooner would he let the fox gnaw out—but I never get straight in a metaphor. What I mean is, that I told him to stop across the water; and no power on earth can bring him over, until he receives the signal. Now I have two points to settle. First, for my own satisfaction—but you need not tell me, unless you please—why did you ruin your life thus? And then, what do you mean to do, about my Jack?"

"I did what I did," said the captain slowly; "because it was impossible, not to do it. We have supposed ourselves to be, of many generations, without taint. Taint of cowardice, or treachery, I mean; for the taint of any other vice seems light. My father knew that his heir, my brother, was of a violent weak nature; brave enough, so far as that goes, but in no way steadfast. In all, except the heirship, and the money spent upon me, I was always looked upon as the elder of the two; and this made my brother dislike me. Or perhaps, I have no right to say that, and perhaps the fault was on my side too; but we never were comfortable together. When we got our commissions, I promised my father, to look after Philip,

so far as I could (because he was wild and thoughtless), and to keep him from doing disgrace to our name, by any unfashionable vices.

"Philip fought shy of me as much as possible. He believed that I despised him, because he was so self-indulgent; and perhaps to some extent, I did. But I do not want to puff myself, at his expense. He had always been indulged, and had known no curb; while I had the benefit of being kept short. He fell into trouble, in London; and my father, who had then much interest, contrived to get him sent out to join us, hoping that discipline, and rough work, might stiffen up his character. Philip submitted, with a very bad grace; and I saw that he would get into some scrape soon, though I little imagined what it would be.

"For I can assure you, Colonel Westcombe, that he was as brave as the best of us; as brave, I mean, in mere bodily courage, and contempt of visible danger. What ailed him, that night, when he lost his mind so, and rushed away headlong, like a tail-piped dog, carrying our men after him, was the terror of an evil conscience. He had done an unmanly thing at home; and he paid for it, with his manhood. He had seduced, under promise of marriage, a beautiful, and innocent young girl, the daughter of one of our chief tenants. Abandoned to disgrace, she drowned herself, after writing him a letter, such as no man should receive. And now, in the depth of that dark night, by the melancholy moaning of the Tagus, her form came slowly up the water to him, bearing her dead babe on her breast. He leaped on his horse, and shouted madly, calling on his men to save him; the flight was sounded, and away went all, scouring out of the ghastly wood, in a panic never known before. My part was simple. I had to redeem my promise to my father, and to save the heir of our race, and our ancient title, from ignominy. Even my father never knew the truth; for he refused to see me, and I could not write against my brother. I lived abroad for several years, after marrying a maiden, whom I long had loved, and who forsook the world for me. When I lost her, I came back to England, with one only little child, and settled in Devon, for my dear wife's sake.

"Now, whether I have been right, in point of conscience, to maintain a lie, is a question for others to decide; who have not been placed as I have. But I never have regretted it; and on the whole, my life has been a happy one."

"So it ought to be," said Colonel Westcombe, not disdaining to shed tears. "I hope, that I might have done the same. But I fear,

that my heart would have broken. And to keep the secret all these years, and to be prepared to die with it! Pole, you are the noblest man, I have ever known, or heard of."

"My dear friend," said the captain smiling; "there was nothing noble in it. Halloa! there is Jack, on our side of the water! You said, no power would bring him over."

"And I said it, in all good faith. What can have brought him? Why Rose, dear Rose, my own child Rose—as you are going to be, I hope,—what has brought you here, in such a flurry?"

"I am not in a flurry, Colonel Westcombe; I am calm—considering all my treatment. For at least three months, I have had such orders—not to go to this place, and not to go to that—and then your son, Mr. John Westcombe, jumps all across the river, into my carnation bed! It appears to me, as if there was no law left. And instead of protecting me, you are going to betray me."

"My darling," said her father; "it is I who must do that. Jack, come here. You were brave enough, just now. Rose, don't be foolish. What did I catch you doing, under the leather-coat apple tree?"

"You didn't catch me doing anything, papa—only having it done to me."

"Very well; so it shall be now. John Westcombe, take her two hands in yours; if she will give them, as I think she will. Then the colonel will kiss her; and so will I."

"I will kiss my own dear father first," said the maiden, with a prospect of much blushing; "and then Colonel Westcombe—and that will be quite enough."

Now whether she carried out that arrangement, without the lady's postscript to it—where the gist of the communication lies—is a question for Jack, and herself, alone. For the colonel, and the captain, marched away, discussing the days, "when life was life" (because there was so much death, to enliven it), and with great breadth of instance, proving how sad it would be, to be one's own grandson. Happy is the fine fruit ripening thus, with pity for the bloom-bud forming at its base, pleasure in the memory of bygone storms, and sunny content with its own rich honour.

But there was a little tumult yet to come, when General Punk, on a Dartmoor charger, twelve hands and a half in height, set forth at the head of a vast expedition, to capture, or slay, Black Wenlow. That armament still forms a date, in the annals of the moor, and of Okehampton; for verily there it was fitted out, the day before great market-day. Every breast was inspired, with ancestral valour,

every stomach, with contemporary thirst and hunger; because the old general stood treat. And if, after that, they caught nobody at all, it was simply because there was nobody to catch. As for Guy Wenlow, and the very extraordinary things that happened to him, his reasons for taking to savage life, his great single-handed encounter with *Nous*, the effect upon his mind of Mr. Gaston's sad end, and the marvellous device and ingenuity, by which he built himself a dry house beneath the peat, and furnished it purely at his neighbours' expense—it would be a Wenlovian, or even a Munrovian act, on our part, to pirate the work, which Mr. Short has in hand, upon that subject.

Neither has Mr. Short yet finished that "Song of the Rose," which he promised to the world; for which delay there are two good reasons—the first, that Dicky Touchwood, upon his return to Cambridge, developed extraordinary poetic power (which raised him above all competition), whether from the way in which he was taken off his feet, or whether from such sense of wrong, as invented the iambus. And a still better reason was, that Julia, though generally submissive, and enwrapped in children—who were called "the tall Shorts" everywhere—could, by no fallacy of connubial logic, be urged into sufferance of such an outrage.

But perhaps the best reason of all was this—that the subject was above him; as the beauty of the rose is above imagination; because it is nature's beauty.

Yet, the purest, and grandest beauty, (far beyond that of the fairest flower, and high above nature's noblest work,) is of the mind and soul, that labour to enlarge our humble course; by no defiance, or heroism, or even conscious teaching; but by patience, cheerfulness, and modesty, truth, simplicity, and loving-kindness.

THE END.

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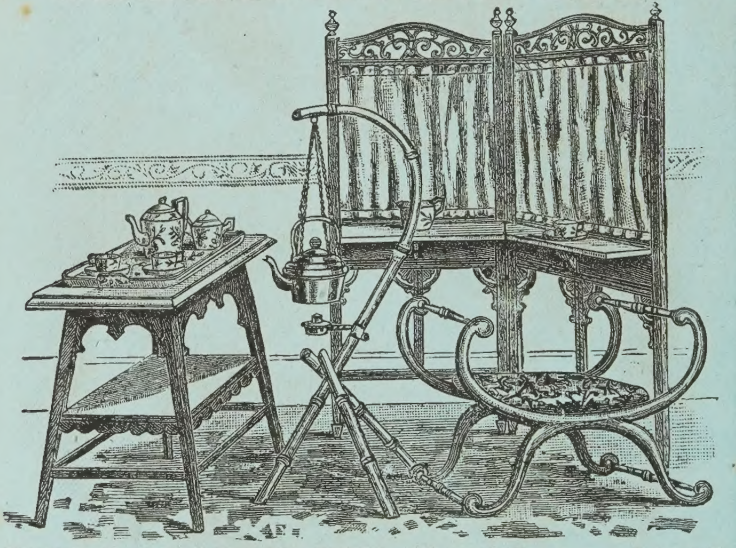

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